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The Heir Presumptive and the Heir Apparent.

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CHAPTER XIX.

MARY came back from her travels a most composed and dignified young matron, bearing her honours sweetly, yet with a mild consciousness of their importance. I say young, for though she was forty she had always preserved her slim youthfulness of aspect, and the unwrinkled brow which belongs to a gentle temper and contented soul. She looked younger as Lady Frogmore than she had done as Miss Hill. The simple dresses, which were perhaps a little too simple for her age, had not become her so well as those she now wore, the rich silks and velvets which the ladies at the Vicarage felt and pushed and admired with an elation of soul in regarding "our Mary" which it would be impossible to put into words. Mrs. Hill herself had now a velvet dress, a thing to which she had looked wistfully all her life as the acme of woman grandeur without any hope of ever attaining it; and Agnes had been supplied with a little trousseau to enable her to pay in comfort her first visit at the Park. But when Mary appeared in the Frogmore diamonds at the head of her own table, receiving the best people in the county, Agnes was silent in awe and admiration. For Mary Hill, who had never asserted herself anywhere, had insensibly acquired the self-possession of her new rank, her sister could not tell how. And the little old gentleman beamed like a wintry sun upon his household and his guests. Impossible to imagine a kinder host, a more delightful brother-in-law. He was good to everybody who had ever had to do with Mary—the old aunts in London; even, oddly enough,

Ralph Ravelstone, who so frankly informed Lord Frogmore of his intention to marry Mary had all gone well with him. There had been an additional little episode about Ralph which nobody knew of, not even Mary herself. For Lord Frogmore had received from Mrs. John Parke, a day or two before the marriage, the note which Mary had written to Ralph begging him to meet her at the sun-dial in the grounds of Greenpark on that eventful day Lord Frogmore had made his first appearance. The reader may recollect that this note had been an urgent appeal for an interview, when Letitia had demanded of Mary that she should send Ralph away. Lord Frogmore burnt the little note, which, indeed, was evidently a note written in great perturbation of mind, and drew his wife into conversation upon the events of the day, from which he very speedily understood the situation, and the exact character of Mary's intercourse with Ralph. He replied by a most polite note to Letitia, informing her that he was very glad to be able to do, in response to her friendly recommendation, something for her brother—not, perhaps, equal to his merits, but the best that was in his power—by making Ralph agent for his Westmoreland property. There was not very much responsibility, nor a large income, but at all events a life of activity and freedom which he believed was in consonance with Mr. Ravelstone's habits and tastes. Letitia was entirely overwhelmed by this communication. She grew pale while she read, overawed as by a superior spirit.

It will be well, however, to draw a veil over the behaviour of Letitia at this trying moment of her career. She had reason to be angry. There was scarcely any of the lookers-on at this drama of ordinary life who did not acknowledge that. All her actions for years had been shaped by the conviction that sooner or later she would be Lady Frogmore. She had married John Parke on that understanding. It is possible, indeed, that, as no one else offered, she might have married him anyhow, for the substantial, if modest, advantages which his individual position secured. But nowadays Letitia did not remember that, and felt convinced that she had married him because he was heir presumptive to Lord Frogmore. Who could say now when that designation might be erased from the peerage? And even if it were not erased, there was still the humiliating certainty that Mary—Mary Hill—was my Lady Frogmore, a fact that pro-

duced paroxysms almost of madness in the bosom of Mrs. John Parke. And she had a right to be angry. Even Mrs. Hill allowed this. To have had for years only an old bachelor between you and your highest hopes—and then that he should marry at sixty-seven! If ever woman had a grievance, Letitia was that woman. A certain amount of rage, virulence, revengeful feeling, was what everybody expected. It was even allowed that the fact of the interloper being a dependent of her own—a useful old friend—made things worse. She was bound, indeed, for her own sake, to preserve appearances a little more than she did; but, except in that respect, nobody blamed her. It was a very hard case. And more than by anybody else was this felt by Lady Frogmore, who did everything that woman could do to conciliate Letitia. She sent endless presents to the children, invited them to the Park—condescended in every way to keep them in the foreground. She even urged that Duke should spend as much time with them as possible, in order that Lord Frogmore should get to know his heir! His heir! Poor Mary insisted upon this—repeated it, lost no opportunity of directing attention to the fact—good heavens!—until at last one day—

One day—it was early in the year, a day in spring, when she had been married for more than a twelvemonth, and had quite got used to her position, and felt as if she had worn velvet and diamonds, and a coronet upon her pocket-handkerchiefs, all her life. Mary had got so used to it all that when a stranger in a London shop, or a cottager, or any person of the inferior classes called her ma'am instead of my lady, she was much amused by the mistake. And she had forgotten all evil prognostications, and was almost happy in a sort of truce with Letitia, kept up by the presents and the visits and numberless overtures of amity which it pleased her to make, and which Mrs. John condescended to accept. She had begun to think that all was well, and to know herself to be happy, and to feel as if nobody could ever be ill or die, or fall into trouble more.

When suddenly Mary made a discovery—the first suspicion of which threw her into a faintness which made the world swim all about her. It was a beautiful day, full of light and life and hope. The birds were twittering in every tree, talking over their new nests and where to build them, flitting about to look at different sites. Mary was out walking in the grounds, rejoicing in the

lovely air, when suddenly it occurred to her what was the matter with her, for she had been slightly invalidish—out of her usual way. All at once her head swam, her whole being grew faint. She tottered along as well as she could till she came to one of the late cuttings in the avenue, where the great trunk of a tree was lying on the side of the path, and then she sat down to think. A great tremor came over her, a something of sweetness indescribable, something like the welling out of a fountain of joy and delight. She had never been a knowing woman or experienced in the courts of life, but rather prim and old-maidish in her reserve. And she had not known or thought what might be going on—was that what it was? She sat down to think, and for half-an-hour Mary's mild spirit was, as it were, in heaven. Tears, delicious tears came to her eyes; a tender awe came over her—a feeling which is one of the compensations of women for the many special troubles that they have to bear. As the one is indescribable so are the others. Mary could not for her life have put into words the emotions which filled her heart.

Presently Lord Frogmore came in sight, walking briskly up the avenue, the trimmest, most active, cheerfulest of old gentlemen. He was never far off from where his wife was, liking to be near her, regarding her with an honest homely affection that had something polished in it. He came up to her, quickening his pace.

"Are you tired, Mary," he said, "or were you waiting for me?"

"Partly the one and partly the other," said Mary, bringing herself back to ordinary life with a little start and shock. He seated himself beside her upon the tree.

"I think, my dear," he said, "that you have been of late more easily tired than you used to be."

"Oh, no," said Mary, with a sudden flush, for she was jealous of her secret, and shy as a girl, not knowing how it ever could be put into words. She got up quickly, shaking her skirts from the dead leaves which had been lying in the crevices. "I am not in the least tired now," she said, "and it is time to get home."

"On account of little Duke?" said Lord Frogmore. "You may be sure the boy is happy enough. I think you are as fond of that boy, Mary, as if he were your own."

She had been a step in advance of him going on, but now she turned round suddenly and gave him a look—such a look. Never

in all their life before had Mary's mild eyes confessed such unfathomable things. The look filled Lord Frogmore with amazement and dismay.

"Mary," he said, "my dear, what is the matter? What has happened? What is wrong?"

She made him no reply; but suddenly the light went out altogether from the eyes which had turned to him so solemn and terrible a look. And Mary did what she had never done in her life—slid down at his feet in a faint, falling upon the grass on the side of the way. It was all so quiet, so instantaneous, that poor Lord Frogmore was taken doubly unprepared. There was nothing violent even about the fall. She slipped from his side noiselessly, and lay there without a movement or a cry. The old lord was for a moment terrified beyond measure, but presently perceived that it was merely a faint, and knelt down by her, taking off her bonnet, fanning her with his hat, watching till the life should come back. He had shouted for help, but Mary came to herself before any help arrived. She raised herself from the ground, the damp freshness of which had restored her, and put up her hand to her uncovered head in confusion. And then the colourless face suddenly flushed red, and she cried, "Oh, what have I been doing? I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, Frogmore."

"Hush, my dear, you have done nothing but what is quite natural," said the old lord, who was far more experienced than Mary. "Don't hurry yourself, nor jump up in that impetuous way. Gently, gently, my love; here is some one coming. Bring round the pony carriage at once, Gregory; your mistress is tired. At once, I say."

"Oh, I can walk. There is really nothing the matter, Frogmore."

"Nothing at all, my dear," said Lord Frogmore cheerfully. "Keep quite quiet and don't disturb yourself." He sat down beside her on the grass, though he knew it was very bad for him. "Never mind the bonnet; you don't want it this pleasant day. And what pretty hair you have, Mary. It is a good thing when your bonnet falls off; it shows your pretty hair."

With such words he soothed her, with little compliments and tenderesses as if she had been a child, divining many things, and not feeling any of those inclinations to blame which younger

husbands exercise so freely. Lord Frogmore was all indulgence for the wife who was young in his eyes, so much younger than himself. He put her into the little carriage when it came and drove her gently home with all the care of a father. Mary had quite recovered herself by this time, and had arranged her bonnet and looked herself, trim as usual, though a little pale, when Gregory came jingling back with the quiet pony and the little cart with which Mary herself drove about the park. And they had quite a cheerful drive home, though Mary's subdued tones—she who always was so quiet—and paleness were very touching to her old husband. But when they reached the hall door, where her maid and the housekeeper were both waiting, having heard that Lady Frogmore had been ill, and being both of them better instructed women than she—just as she stepped out of the carriage with her husband's help, smiling and saying it was nothing, there was a childish shout in the hall, and Duke, rushing out with a bound, flung himself upon her.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, I've got something to tell you—I've got something to tell you!" cried the boy.

"Get away with you, child," said Lord Frogmore; "out of the way—out of the way. Don't you see she's ill?"

The colour that had been coming back fled out of Mary's cheeks again. Her eyes once more gave a look of anguish, straight into her husband's heart. She stopped as if struck to stone, with her foot upon the step. But she did not faint again, as they feared. She put out her hand to the boy.

"He must not suffer—he must not suffer. Promise me," she said, with a shudder, "that he shall not suffer, Frogmore?"

Fortunately this was said almost under her breath, so that no one could distinguish what it was except the old lord himself, who was extremely distressed and puzzled. He remained downstairs very anxious while the women attended Mary to her room. What should little Duke have to do with it? Why should he be brought in? The child hung about his uncle, asking a thousand questions. What was the matter with Aunt Mary? Why did she look so pale? Was she going to bed so early—before tea? What did she want with the doctor? Duke had not discrimination enough to see that he was not wanted, but when Lord Frogmore's patience broke down, and he said, sharply, "Go away, child; for goodness' sake go away," Duke retired in great offence, feeling that the

world was a desert, and that nothing but an abrupt return home would make it worth while to live. It was all he could do to keep himself from setting out at once on foot. He rushed out into the hall with that intention, but was checked by the sight of the butler at the door, who was still giving his instructions to the mounted groom outside.

"He's to come as fast as he can, and you're to go on wherever he may have gone till you find him—a deal of fuss about nothing," the butler was saying. "My missus——," but here he broke off, seeing the puzzled face of little Duke, and the groom rode off at great speed, as if he had never lingered for a minute's gossip during all his life.

"Is Aunt Mary very ill?" said Duke.

"I don't think so, sir; no more than other ladies," said the experienced butler.

"Mamma's ill sometimes," said the little boy.

"They mostly is, sir," returned the other grimly.

"But she won't take nasty physic as we have to do—nurse never asks me, though I am the oldest, and the one that is of most consequence."

"You've always been the heir, my little gentleman," said the butler, "and made a deal of fuss with; but I wouldn't say nothing on that subject if I were you now."

"Why?" said Duke, opening large eyes; but Mr. Porter had occupied enough of his precious time with a little boy, and now turned away, vouchsafing no reply.

CHAPTER XX.

LORD FROGMORE had always been cheerful, but now he was gayer than ever—for to be sure Mary soon recovered from her momentary illness, which was more nerves than anything else, though she was so far from being a nervous subject. She was taken the greatest care of during that summer, and the old lord looked twenty years younger. He whistled when he went out for his walks; he had a smile and a pleasant word for everybody. He grew absolutely juvenile in his extreme satisfaction with himself and everything about him. "You'd say fifty-five at the very most to see him kicking along the road like a new-married man," said the old woman at the gates, who was just Lord

Frogmore's age, and "expected" a great-grandchild in a week or two. Nothing could exceed his satisfaction and complacency. He reconciled himself to Duke by presenting the boy with a pony all to himself to take home—which had been Duke's chief earthly desire—and took him to the stable to see the "leggy" colt which was Uncle Ralph's present, and which had grown into a tough but not lovely hunter, justifying his original owner's prophecy.

"Do you think Aunt Mary could ride this, Duke?" the old gentleman asked, with a chuckle.

"Aunt Mary!" cried the boy with a shout, "she's frightened of Polo when he's fresh."

"So she is," said Lord Frogmore. "I shouldn't wonder if she let you ride this one when your father takes you out with him."

"Oh, Uncle Frogmore! why he could step over the big fence without jumping at all," cried Duke in ecstasy. The old lord was kind to the boy, kinder than he had ever been before.

Why it was that Letitia should have come herself to fetch Duke home on that occasion I have never ascertained. Perhaps it was something in the air, one of those presentiments, sympathetic or antipathetic, brain-waves as the wise call them, which suggested to Mrs. John Parke the possibility of some new turn in the aspect of affairs. She did not ask any questions or receive any definite information during her stay of three days, at least from the heads of the house, but no doubt she drew her own conclusions from the extreme cheerfulness of the head of the house, and the subdued but anxious conciliatory ways of Mary. Mary was always conciliatory, always anxious to make up to Letitia as for an imaginary wrong, but she had never been so anxious as now. She took advantage of a birthday in the family to send a great box full of presents, in which every child in the house had a share. She was eager to know if there was anything Letitia wanted—a desire in which Mrs. Parke did not balk her, notwithstanding that it was gall and wormwood to receive anything from Mary's hands. We have all, however, a good deal of gall and wormwood to swallow in the course of our lives, and it was something to secure a solid advantage even at that cost. Letitia did not let her pride stand in the way. But to come to the Park and see Mary in full possession, with that old fool, as his sister-in-law called him, smirking and smiling at her, and every-

body serving her hand and foot, was hard for Letitia to endure at any time—and was doubly hard now. For all the more that she was not told anything, Mrs. Parke felt danger and destruction in the air. The care with which Mary was surrounded, the gaiety of Lord Frogmore, seemed proof positive at one moment of the failure of all her own hopes. But then, she said to herself, why are they so exuberant towards Duke, petting the boy as he had never been petted before? This bewildered his mother, for she could not herself have felt any compunctions in such a case. Her feelings in Mary's circumstances would have been pure triumph. Thus, notwithstanding the assurance given by her maid, and all the other signs which she could not ignore, Letitia left the Park with her son, still unsatisfied. Duke was kissed and blessed and tipped more than ever when he left the Frogmores. His pony had been sent off in charge of a groom; every distinction was done to him that could have been done to the future heir. If it was all because he was no longer certain to be the heir! but that was beyond the intuitions of Mrs. John Parke. She went home in heaviness and anger, but still uncertain what to believe. All that she could do was to make poor John's life very uncomfortable to him when she returned. He was cast down too, as was natural. He walked up and down the room gloomily with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders thrust up to his ears as she told the story of her visit. When they were alone Mrs. Parke exercised some uncomfortable economics, though she always contrived to do her husband credit when guests were in the house. Thus there was only one small lamp in the room and no fire, though the day had been damp and cold, and John Parke did not feel disposed to warm himself as his wife did with hot cups of tea.

"Well," he said with a sigh—"there was nothing else to be expected. You might have made up your mind to that from the day they were married. I did," said John with a nod of his head, which was sunk between his shoulders, as if he had been the most foreseeing philosopher in the world.

"I have not made up my mind yet," said Letitia, "for why didn't they tell me? Mary could never have kept in her triumph. And as for Frogmore, he would have been bursting with it. To be sure, Felicia—but I don't put much faith in what the maids say. And then, why should they have been so more

than usually fond of Duke? No; I won't believe it," Mrs. Parke cried. "They couldn't have resisted the triumph over me."

"I tell you what," cried John, "I won't have that little brute of a pony in my stables. If Frogmore chooses to give Duke presents like that he must keep it for him. A little beast! and fit to eat as much corn as my best hunter. I can't have it here."

"John! We must not offend Frogmore."

"Oh, offend Frogmore! When you tell me we are to be cut out and disinherited and lose everything."

"I never said that. I wouldn't say it," said Mrs. Parke piously, "as if the worst had happened, for there's always Providence to take into account, and measles and whooping-cough and that sort of thing. And it might be a girl, and a hundred things happen—if it's anything at all, which I don't believe myself," Letitia said, yet with a tremor at her heart. "Go away, for goodness' sake, and dress," she added, with irritation. "To see you going up and down, up and down, like the villains in the theatre, is more than my nerves can stand. For goodness' sake go away."

"I can't take this sort of news so easily as you do," said John, with his head upon his breast.

"So easily as I do! Oh, go away, go away, and don't drive me mad with your folly," cried his wife. "Do you think it can ever be half as much to you as it is to me? To see that Mary Hill in the place that should be mine, to kiss her and pretend to be friends when I could tear her in pieces with my hand; to see your old fool of a brother, who ought to have been dead and buried——"

"Letitia, not a word against Frogmore!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks about Frogmore! as if one could have any patience with an old —— He ought to have been dead and buried long ago. No man has a right to live on society, and keep other people out of their rights. And to marry at that age! It ought to be punished like murder. It's as bad as murder and robbery and sacrilege and high treason all together. I can't think how you can find a word to say for him, John Parke."

"For one thing he's not seventy—as you may see in any peerage——"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" cried Letitia—and what answer could be made to that? Altogether Greenpark was on that evening a melancholy house.

Such questions cannot remain long in any doubt, and before the summer was at all advanced Mrs. Parke was compelled to give full evidence to the terrible truth. Needless to say that in the bottom of her heart she had been certain of it all along, though she held out so stoutly and would not acknowledge it to be true. But when it became known that Mrs. Hill and Agnes had arrived at the Park for a long visit, Mrs. John had a paroxysm of almost frenzy which for a day or two kept her to her bed, where she lay devouring her soul with imaginations of what was happening. Imaginations! Did she not know as well as if she had seen them what was going? Mrs. Hill—oh, with what beaming of pleasure on her face!—bustling about, putting everybody right. Agnes, like another Mary, full of importance too. The family from the Vicarage altogether at the head of affairs, regulating everything, occupying the whole place, scarcely leaving room enough in his own house for poor old Frogmore, the old fool, the old ass, who had brought all this upon his family. Letitia raged within herself with internal wars and wails of wrath and anguish, like a wild beast, for three days; and then she got up and announced her intention of paying a visit to the Park.

"It's only right that I should go and ask for her!" she said, with a curl of her lip over her teeth which made this English lady look like a hyena.

"For goodness' sake, Letitia, mind what you are about. Don't go and betray yourself," said her husband in alarm.

"Oh, you may leave me to take care of that," she said.

She arrived quite suddenly and unexpectedly, without a maid even, with a new travelling bag. "I felt that I must see dear Mary once more before—. At her age one always feels a little nervous for an affair of this kind," she said sympathetically to Lord Frogmore, whose radiant countenance naturally clouded over at this remark. "I can go home to-night if there's no room for me," she added, "though I brought a bag, you see, in case I should stay."

"There must always be room for my brother John's wife in any circumstances," said the polite old lord, but he did not lead the way into the inner sanctuary until he had carried the news of this unexpected arrival. "Mrs. John Parke, my dear," he said, "is so terribly anxious about you, Mary, that she has come all this way to know how you are."

"Oh, Letitia!" cried Mary, and "Tisch!" cried Agnes, in equal consternation. They looked at each other and grew pale.

"Let me go down and speak to her. She will frighten Mary out of her wits if she comes upstairs."

"Oh, no," said Mary faintly, "she must come in. Oh, Frogmore, I can't blame her, when I think of those poor children. Perhaps she will feel a little more for me—now——"

"Feel for you! You are the happiest woman I know," said Agnes, indignant at her sister's weakness.

"She feels nothing but envy and malice and all uncharitableness," cried the old lord. "Never mind, my love. We'll do our best for the children all the same; but you won't let a woman like that interfere with your happiness, Mary?"

"N—no," said Mary doubtfully. She grew very white, and then very red, and cried, "Oh, let her come at once—let me get it over," with something that was very like a cry of despair.

But there was no offence in Letitia's looks when she made her appearance. She explained again that she had brought a bag in case they would have her for the night, but otherwise that she could very well return to Greenpark the same night, for she would not for all the world upset dear Mary. Her eyes went round the room taking in everything at a glance. Oh, so like the Hills, she said to herself. Just what she would have expected of them. The big chair, which was exactly like Mrs. Hill, as if it had been made in imitation of her, and all the little trumpery ornaments and things, little pots of flowers and so forth. But Letitia took the chair which was like Mrs. Hill, feeling a momentary satisfaction in disturbing the habit which no doubt the vicar's wife had already formed of sitting there, and beamed upon the little party as if she was as happy in her friend's prospects as any of the family could be.

It was not until the evening that she showed the cloud that was hid under all this velvet. She had been so *nice*, so exactly what a sympathetic sister-in-law should be, that Mary's mother and sister had not hesitated to leave her alone with their interesting invalid. Lord Frogmore had gone out for one of his frequent walks. The twilight was falling upon the long warm August day. It had begun to get a little dim in the room, though Mary through the open window was still watching the last evening glories in the western sky. Mary, too, had lost her fear of

Letitia. It was so much more natural to think well of any one; to believe at bottom an old friend must always be kind. And what would be more natural between two old friends than to go back at such an hour upon the past, especially the past which had linked them so much more closely together.

"When one thinks," said Letitia with a laugh, "how strangely things come about. Do you remember, Mary, how we met in the picture-gallery? It was the Grosvenor Gallery, wasn't it? But no; they had not begun there. It must have been in the Academy, I suppose. It was just a chance, as people say, that took you and I there at the same time. You were with those old-fashioned aunts of yours. And you were very old-fashioned yourself, my dear, if I may say so now. Very neat, you know—you always were neat—but your things looking as if they had all been made at home, and made a good while ago, and as well taken care of. Oh, I think I can see you now—and to think from that chance meeting how much has come!"

"Yes, indeed," said Mary, "when one thinks of it, as you say——" Poor Mary's voice trembled. She gave a despairing glance towards the door. But no one came to her rescue. Mrs. Hill and Agnes were busy laying out a whole wardrobe of "things" to show to Tisch.

"Yes, when one thinks of it! What put it into my head, I wonder, to ask you to come to Greenpark for a long visit? I hadn't as much as thought of you for years, and all at once I saw you standing there, and the thought came into my head. If something hadn't put that into my mind how different everything might have been for both of us! You would have been just Mary Hill, the Vicar of Grocombe's daughter, living very poorly in that dreadful old place, and I should have been—well, looking forward sooner or later to having this nice old house, and the title and all that. Dear me, how little one knows what difference in one's life a rash word can make."

"You can't feel it more than—I do, Letitia," said Mary in very subdued and tremulous tones, pulling closer round her with her old agitated movement the lace shawl that had replaced her knitted one.

"Oh, yes," said Letitia, "I do, my dear, for I have suffered by it, you know, while you have benefited—that makes all the difference in the world. When I think how different things might have been

had I only just said, 'How d'ye do, Mary?' and gone by. Then you would never have met Frogmore, never had it in your power to change anything, never turned against me and the poor children——"

"Letitia, oh, don't say I've turned against you. How have I turned against you? I love the children as if—as if——"

"My dear," said Letitia, "you know we needn't discuss that. You would never have turned against us, I am quite sure, if it hadn't been so very much to your own advantage. And nobody would expect you for a moment to have done otherwise. Think of what you've gained by it. A title—who would have thought of a title for one of the Vicar of Grocombe's daughters?—and everything that heart could desire. A handsome house, two very fine places which you know Frogmore has, not to speak of the house in town which he lets, but which I'm sure you won't allow him to go on letting. And now, having got everything else, you're going to have an heir, Mary Hill—oh, I forgot, you're not Mary Hill, you're my Lady Frogmore—an heir, which is the best of all to turn my poor boy out of his chance, out of what we all thought so sure. No, I don't want to say—I'm amazed at myself for saying, but I can't help it. I'm Duke's mother, and I can't—I can't but think of my boy."

"Oh, Letitia!" said Mary piteously, holding out her hands in an agonized appeal.

"Oh, I don't blame you," cried Letitia; "how could you be supposed not to think of your own advantage? What am I to you? What are we to you that you shouldn't think of yourself first? Oh, of course you thought of yourself first. It would have been quite unnatural if you hadn't done so. But I can't help thinking, Mary, with little Duke upon my mind, and thinking what we must do with him, and that he must be brought up to get his own living now—I can't help thinking if I had just said, 'How d'ye do, Mary,' that day. If I had taken no more notice and never thought, 'Well, they're very poor at the Vicarage, and one person's living would never be missed in our house, and that it might be such a thing for you.' Oh, if I hadn't been so silly, how different everything might have been! I don't blame you—not the least in the world; for of course you thought first of what was to your own advantage. But I do blame myself. Oh, I do blame myself! If it hadn't been for that you would never have

seen Lord Frogmore, and how different everything would have been!"

"Oh, Letitia," cried Mary, as she had done at intervals all through this long address. The tears were pouring down her cheeks. Sometimes she hid her face in her hands, sometimes raised it to give her tormentor an appealing look, a protest against this cruelty. "Oh, Letitia, Letitia, spare me. It is not my fault. I never thought—I never believed—I would rather have died than injure you or the children. It made me ill when I first heard. To think of little Duke. Oh, Letitia, I think my heart will break!"

"Oh, my dear," said Letitia. "I know all about hearts' breaking. It never stops you from having your own way. What is the use of saying you would rather die? Would you rather die with all the good things in life before you? Nonsense, Mary! Don't talk to me as if I didn't know all about it. Now you'll be petted and fêted and made as if there never was the like before—you and your baby—while my poor Duke, my Duke, that was the real, rightful heir——"

Mrs. John burst forth in sobs and tears, and the room grew darker and darker. Mary, huddled up in a corner of the sofa, heard and saw no more.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE baby was born next morning, after a night which was terrible for all the household in the Park. Mrs. John left hurriedly after she had called the attendants to Mary, who, she said, did not seem well. She got the brougham to drive her to the station, saying that she would not stay to add to the trouble of the house at such a moment, but begging the butler to send her a telegram as soon as there was any news to tell, "which will not be long," she said. I think she did feel a little guilty as she drove away. It was, one might say, Letitia's first crime. She had done many things that were very doubtful, and she had not been very regardful of her neighbour generally, nor loved him as herself. Yet she had never addressed herself to a fellow-creature with an absolute and distinct intention to do harm before. And she was not comfortable. She tried to reassure herself that she had spoken nothing but the truth, and that they

deserved nothing better at her hands, but still she was not easy in her mind. She could not get out of her eyes the sight of Mary huddled up in her corner, with nothing but a gasping breath to show that she was alive—nor could she help asking herself what might be happening as she herself hurried through the soft-falling night, getting away as fast as she could from the house in which that drama of life or death was going on. She had heard the scream Agnes gave as she went in with her candle. In the urgency of attending to Lady Frogmore no one noticed Mrs. John running so hastily downstairs. Nobody, she said to herself, would think of identifying her with it, whatever happened. And nothing would happen. Oh, no, no. No such chance. They had constitutions of iron, all those Hills. And why should it harm Mary or any one to hear what was the simple truth?

It was a dreadful night at the Park. The old lord wandered up and down like an unquiet spirit unable to rest. Rogers, who was more shocked than words could say by an exhibition of feeling which went against all the laws of health, endeavoured in vain to get him to go to bed. "For you can do no good, my lord—none of us can do any good. Things will take their course, and the medical man is here. My lady would be most distressed of all if she knew that you were losing your night's sleep, which is the most important thing, more important even than food. I do entreat your lordship to go to bed. I'll sit up and bring the first news—the very first, if you'll go to bed, my lord."

"It is easy speaking," said Lord Frogmore; "you're a good fellow, Rogers. Go to bed yourself. It's my turn to sit up to-night."

"But it don't affect me, and it will affect your lordship—and what will my lady say to me when she knows?"

"Oh, don't speak to me," cried the old lord with the water in his eyes. "I'll give you a sovereign for every word she says to you, when she's able to take any notice, Rogers, either of you or me."

"That'll be to-morrow, my lord," said the man, "and I know her ladyship will never put faith in me again. But at least you'll take your beef tea."

Lord Frogmore pushed him away and bade him take the beef

tea himself and coddle himself up as he had done his master so long. As for himself, he kept trotting up and downstairs all the night. It was far too late at sixty-nine, after taking such care of himself, to begin this life of emotion and anxiety ; and the morning light, when it stole in through all the closed shutters, flouting the candles, and poured down the great staircase, making the lamp in the hall look so foolish, made sad game of the old lord's rosy face, generally so fresh and smooth. But, happily, ease came with the morning, and the best of news : a boy—and all very quiet, and every prospect that everything would go well. Lord Frogmore was allowed to peep at the top of a small head done up in flannel, and at the mother's pale face on the pillow, and then he resigned himself to Rogers to be put to bed. But he was now so overflowing with delight that he chattered like an old woman to his faithful servant. "Rogers," he said, "you've heard it's a boy?"

"Yes, my lord, and I wish you every happiness in him," Rogers said.

"I am afraid my wife will be disappointed," said Lord Frogmore. "She's so fond of my little nephew, little Duke. She would rather it had been a girl for that. Poor little Duke! Now he's quite out of it, the little shaver." And Lord Frogmore laughed. He was sorry for Duke, or at least would have been had there been room in him for anything but joy. "Did I ever tell you, Rogers, what that little fellow said the first time I ever went to Greenpark, eh? He said, 'When you're dead papa will be Lord Frogmore, and when papa's dead, me.' Poor little shaver! He was too cocksure," said Lord Frogmore again with a triumphant laugh.

"It'll make a deal of difference to him, my lord."

"Yes, it'll make a deal of difference. But they couldn't expect me to consider them before myself," said Lord Frogmore. "A man likes to have an heir of his own, Rogers—a son of his own to come after him."

"Yes, he do, my lord," Rogers said.

"A man loves to have an heir of his own," repeated the old lord with a beaming face—"his own flesh and blood—his own son to sit in his place. That's what a man prefers before everything, Rogers."

"He do, my lord," Rogers once more replied.

"You put up with it when you can't help it ; but a son of your own to come after you, Rogers!"

"Yes, my lord—if you'll drink this while it is hot, and get into bed."

"You're a sad martinet, Rogers. I don't believe you mind a bit, or care, whether it is a girl or a boy. I'll have no beef tea. I'll have some champagne to drink to the heir."

"Oh, my lord, my lord! You'll have one of your attacks, and then what will her ladyship say to me?" said the much-troubled Rogers, to whom his old master was generally so obedient.

It was enough to drive the man who had the responsibility, whom everybody looked to, out of his mind. At last, however, the old lord was got to bed, and after his exhausting night had a long and sound sleep.

But before Lord Frogmore awoke agitating rumours had already begun to run through the house. Nobody quite knew what it was ; but it began to be rumoured that her ladyship was not doing so well as was expected, that she was in a bad way. Whether it was fever or what it was, nobody would tell. A consciousness of such a fact will breathe through a house or even a country without either details or certainty. The doctor's face as he came downstairs, his lingering after it was clear he was no longer wanted, an exclamation, surprised from the lips of one of the ladies, or even a gravity in the aspect of the nurse, to whom a curious housemaid had handed in something that was wanted, each supported and strengthened the other. Not so well as might be expected. When Lord Frogmore awoke it was afternoon, for he had slept long in the satisfaction of his soul and the calming of his fears, and he saw a revelation in the face of Rogers when questioned how my lady was. Rogers lied with his lips, or at least he brought forth with a little difficulty the usual words ; but Lord Frogmore could not be deceived by his face. The old gentleman rose with a sudden chill at his heart and dressed hurriedly and hastened to his wife's room, where he could see they were reluctant to admit him. Mary was lying with a clouded countenance, not like herself, not asleep, as they said at first, but muttering to herself, and the faces of her sister and the nurse who were watching by her were very anxious. "She wants something. What is it she wants?" said the old

lord anxiously. The experienced nurse shook her head with an ominous gravity, and begged that the poor lady might not be disturbed. "They are like that sometimes," she said, "till they get a good sleep."

"But what is it? What is it she wants? Get her what she wants," said Lord Frogmore, going to the side of the bed. Mary saw him, for she moved a little and raised her voice. "It is a girl—it is a girl—say it is a girl. Say—say it is a girl!" She looked at him with a piteous appeal that broke his heart. Ah, no, she did not know him. She appealed to him as a sane man, as one who could satisfy her. "It is a girl—you know—you know it is a girl!" she cried.

The heart of the poor old lord swelled to bursting. This was all as new to him as if he had been a boy-husband, disturbed, yet so joyful and proud. "No, Mary," he said; "no, my dear. It's a beautiful boy. The thing I desired most in the world was this heir."

Mary gave a shriek that rang through all the house. She got up in her bed, her face convulsed with horror and terror. "No, no," she cried; "no, no, no. The heir—not the heir—not the heir. Oh, take it away. Didn't you hear what she said: It will grow up an idiot and kill us. Take it away—take it away."

"Mary!" cried the old lord, taking her hand, "Mary! This is that wretched woman's doing that has frightened her. Mary, my love, it is your own child; a beautiful child. Our son, the boy I wanted, Mary."

Mary snatched her hand from his. She shrank away from him to the other edge of the bed. "No, not a boy—no, no, no!—no heir!—there is an heir," she cried, clutching at the woman who stood on the other side, as if escaping from a danger. "He doesn't know—he doesn't know," she cried, flinging herself upon the nurse. "It will grow up an idiot and kill me. Do you hear? Do you hear? Say it's not so—oh, say it's not so!"

"No, no, my poor dear lady, no, no! It's as you wish; it'll be all you wish," said the nurse, holding the patient in her arms. And Mary clung to the woman, holding her fast, whispering in her ear. Lord Frogmore stood with piteous eyes and saw his wife shrinking from him, talking to the woman, who bent over her, with the dreadful whisper of insanity, which meant nothing.

Was this what it had come to—all the pride and triumph and joy? The old lord stood with his limbs trembling under him, his old heart sore with disappointment and cold with terror. His mild Mary! What had changed her in a moment in the illusion of happiness to this frenzied sufferer? When he saw that she kept hiding her head in the nurse's breast, clinging to her, he withdrew sorrowful and subdued to where Agnes sat by the fire with the little bundle of flannel on her lap. She was crying quietly under her breath, and looked up at him as he came towards her with sympathetic trouble. "They say," she whispered, "that it's often so just at first when they want sleep. Oh, don't lose heart!"

"It's that accursed woman," he said under his breath.

"Oh, I hope not—I hope it's only—She will be better when she has slept. Look at him, poor little darling," said Agnes unfolding the shawls. Lord Frogmore cast a troubled glance at the poor little heir who seemed about to cost him so dear. He had no heart to look at the child. He crept out of the room afterwards feeling all his years and his unfitness, a man near seventy, for the cares and responsibilities of a father. A father for the first time in his seventieth year. And Mary, Mary! So soon was triumph changed to terror and woe.

The doctor gave him a little comfort when he came. He said that such cases were not very rare. So great a shock and ordeal to go through acted on delicate nerves and organization with a force they were unable to withstand, and sometimes the mind was pushed off its balance. There would be nothing to be alarmed about if this state should continue for a week or two or even more. It was not very uncommon. The doctor had various instances on his tongue as glib as 'if they had been a list of patronesses at a ball. Nothing to be afraid of! It would pass away, he declared, and leave no sign. As for the interview with Mrs. John, he did not think that had anything to do with it; there was quite enough to account for it without that. He thought it best that Lord Frogmore should keep out the way, not to distress himself with so melancholy a sight. Yes, it was distressing and melancholy; but soon it would pass over, and be like a dream. The old lord was comforted by this consolatory opinion, for the first hour very much so, hoping, as he was told to hope, that in a few days all that alarmed him might be over, and his wife restored to

him. But he was less confident at night, and still less confident next day. Indeed he wanted constant assurance that everything would soon be well. He flagged almost immediately after the new hope had been formed within him, as every day he stole into his wife's room, and every day came downstairs again with the horrible conviction that there was no improvement. Poor Mary! her very face seemed changed; it was haggard and drawn, and her eyes, so wistful and so watchful, shone upon him like stars, not of hope but of misery. Oh, the terror in them, and the watchfulness! For some days she was afraid of him, and turned to the nurse from him, as if to hide herself from his look. But by-and-by she became quiet, supporting his presence, but keeping always a watchful eye upon him. Supporting him, and enduring his presence! Oh, what a thing to say of Mary, his gentle wife, his happy companion. The heart of the old lord sank lower and lower as those dreadful days went by.

(To be continued.)

Royal Weymouth.

By FANNY L. GREEN.

TO-DAY Weymouth is forsaken by Court and crowd. The Reform Bills have taken away its members—two for Weymouth proper, two for Melcombe Regis, its whilom rival. The Mail Coach, the Mercury, and the Balloon have vanished from the road. The train steams into the modern town, but the trade of the port is decayed. It is no longer the royal watering-place whose packet is "duly expected by every British subject with more impatience than even the news from France." The King's house is a hotel, and the Weymouth gentlewomen have ceased to bathe at night with a guide, while the sedan chair waits for them on the quay. There are no public tea drinkings at the Assembly Rooms, no card parties in Charlotte Row. But in its heart this faded Anglo-Indian watering-place still cherishes the memory of its former fashion, and despises the little mob of "trippers" which, in the season, gives it all the stir it knows.

It was in 1780 that the Duke of Gloucester, father of "Silly Billy," passed the winter at Weymouth, and, pleased with its soft air, built himself a great red house fronting the bay. He was the foolish fellow who came in one day while his beautiful wife was sitting to Sir Joshua, and when Lady Waldegrave whispered to him to speak to the painter, said, "So you always begin with the head, do you?" But he loved Weymouth, and the Weymouth people fêted the royal duke, and duly honour his memory.

On his recommendation the King came to the little watering-place in 1789. This was the year of the royal illness, referring to which a page of the presence said: "In popular phraseology, a man in the situation of our sovereign is said to be out of his mind. I think, on the contrary, that the royal mind is inverted." A view to which the King's condition lent some countenance, for the songs and toasts of "Bacchanalians" were then, we are told, as inoffensive to him as "the hymns of angels."

With the Queen and her three daughters came little Burney to give us a lively picture of their doings from her bedroom in the attics. And other satirists were in the King's train. When the royal family dashed into Weymouth—driven by their own postillions, whose round hats with their gold bands, and plain red jackets, blue cuffed, blue caped, had been made on purpose for the journey—"the two Greyhounds" noticed that forthwith "clusters of the populace obstructed the way and sent barbarous noises into the air."

The loyalty of the people was unquestionable, but "one thing," says the witty Frances, "was a little unlucky." When the mayor and burgesses came with the address, they requested leave to kiss hands; this was graciously accorded, but the mayor advancing in a common way to take the Queen's hand, as he might that of any lady mayoress, Colonel Gwynn, who stood by, whispered, "You must kneel, sir!" He found, however, that he took no notice of this hint, but kissed the Queen's hand erect. As he passed him on his way back, the colonel said, "You should have knelt, sir!"

"Sir," answered the poor mayor, "I cannot."

"Everybody does, sir."

"Sir, I have a wooden leg."

* * * * *

Two days later, the King's surprise was not less when, "the first time of his bathing, he had no sooner popped his royal head under water than a band of music, concealed in a neighbouring machine, struck up 'God save Great George, our King.' What a fluttering there was among the fair ladies who tripped down from the bathing machines, their bandeaus inscribed "God save the King." They wore the pious wish, too, in large letters round their waists, little heeding the caustic comment of the Queen's reader. "Flannel dresses, tucked up, and no shoes nor stockings, with bandeaus and girdles, have a most singular appearance. When first I surveyed these loyal nymphs it was with some difficulty I kept my features in order."

"The loyalty of all this place is excessive," she observes at length. "They have dressed out every street with labels of 'God save the King;' all the shops have it over their doors; all the children wear it in their caps; all the labourers in their hats and all the sailors in their voices, for they never approach the house

without shouting it aloud, nor see the King or his shadow without beginning to huzza and going on to three cheers."

The life of the royal visitors settled down into a regular routine. Every morning at five o'clock they were called from their beds. At half-past five the shops were opened. By six the streets were thronged with all the fashionables of the place, waiting to see the King take his bath. During the long day the neighbouring country was explored, and trips were taken on board the "Magnificent" and the "Southampton" frigate. From one of these expeditions the royal party returned "with a complete ducking." "I am but little at home and almost constantly at sea," writes Queen Charlotte, that self-styled *philosophe malgré lui*. We know, however, that she read Mrs. Piozzi's "Tour" to "little Burney" on the sands.

On those same sands—where there were "no boats hauled up, no fishermen's nets spread, or any other obstruction whatever to riding or walking, but for the amusement of the invalid and the community at large, chaises and saddle horses and careful people with pillions and sedan chairs"—the Queen's reader met "the divine Siddons" and tried to see whether her solemnity would wear away by length of conversation. At night all the people went to see the great actress as Rosalind, and doubtless "the house was a bumper." Was not the King there in his improvised box, composed of three front rows of seats railed over and canopied with "crimson satin richly fringed with gold?" But the judgment of the Weymouth world was adverse. "Mrs. Siddons looks beautifully, but too large for that shepherd's dress, and her gaiety sits not naturally upon her—it seems more like disguised gravity," wrote Burney in her *role* of dramatic critic. "She is the Queen of Tears not of Comedy," says another observer of this Rosalind.

Later, when the great actress played Lady Townley, "in her looks and the tragic part she was exquisite." That was the night when "all the royals," having gone to Lulworth Cove, and being detained there by a contrary wind, feared to disappoint the crowd—for "the squeeze at the play" was wont to be as great comparatively as the "squeeze at St. Paul's." They landed accordingly by the theatre at ten o'clock at night, and forthwith "sent home for the King's page with a wig, and the Queen's wardrobe woman with similar decorations." On the late entrance

of the royal guests, the weary house, with unabated loyalty, rose to its feet, and the band having once more played "God save the King," the play proceeded.

Nearly every year, after this first visit, the King came down to Weymouth with his Queen and the Princesses Augusta and Elizabeth—"the Irons of the family." The little town became quite familiar with his homely presence. Now he would stop to ask the price of a turbot and hurry off without waiting for an answer; now "speak most condescendingly to those around him of all ranks, telling them to depend on the wooden walls of Old England," while he watched the fishermen haul the seine and bring to shore from five to twenty or thirty thousand herrings or mackerel at a draught, according to their respective seasons.

With the exquisites of the Assembly Room, and the rustics who left their work to gape at the King in the rain, and exclaim that his arms were not a lion and a unicorn, but just the same as any other man's, the sovereign was equally at his ease. Nor did he fail, with his consort and daughters, to grace the Assembly balls and endorse the stringent rules of Rodber, the M.C.:

I. That gentlemen are not to appear in the rooms on Tuesday or Friday evenings in boots, or ladies in riding habits.

II. That the ball shall begin as soon as possible after seven, and finish precisely at eleven.

III. That gentlemen and ladies who dance down a country dance shall not quit their places till the dance is finished, unless they mean to dance no more that night.

IV. That no lady or gentleman be permitted to dance in coloured gloves.

V. That after a lady has called a dance, and danced it down, her place in the next is at the bottom.

VI. That no tea table be carried into the card-room.

VII. That gentlemen will be pleased to leave their swords at the door.

VIII. That no dogs be admitted.

Though the King and Queen would often honour the public tea drinking of a Sunday night with their presence, they duly attended the parish church to the edification of their subjects. On one of these occasions Dr. Glasse, pedagogue and preacher, observed that the dragoons were without books. The next Sunday, before their Majesties were escorted by mayor and cor-

puration to their seats, the gentle, placid, but too simpering and complacent divine presented the whole detachment with common prayer books. It is to be hoped that the dragoons were not of the mind of the Princess Elizabeth, who wrote: "We began going to chapel this morning; it must be wholesome, it is so disagreeable."

Landmann has given us a lively picture of Weymouth fifteen years after Frances Burney's visit. During the year 1804, it was feared that the King and his family might be carried off by a *coup de main*. Five or six frigates were kept constantly in Portland roadstead and a large military force was quartered in Weymouth and the neighbourhood, from which a whole regiment—six hundred to a thousand men strong in those days—mounted guard every night. Quite a little ceremony was then enacted nightly. As soon as the drum-major came up, flourishing his dazzling silver balloon-headed cane and transferred the same to his left hand while he placed his right over the front of his hat, the King seized his own hat, and swinging it out with his right hand to the fullest extent he could reach, dropped his arm close down to his side. He preserved that posture till the drum-major had gone past and commenced to return the cane to its former position. Then the King clapped his hat on his head—with the warlike air he assumed when he cried, "I should like to fight Bony single-handed; I'm sure I should. I should give him a good thrashing; I'm sure I should; I'm sure of it"—and amidst the huzzas of the multitude passed to the Lodge.

The occasion of Landmann's coming to Weymouth was to put in train the erection of a Martello tower on the Look Out, a project viewed very favourably by the King. The German colonel's first introduction to his sovereign's consort was a little unlucky, though. But he shall tell his own tale.

"On the second morning, after a whole night of heavy rain," he says, "I sallied forth to walk on the Esplanade, in the hope of seeing the Queen and Princesses on their way to bathe. In proceeding along a cross street, my steps were for a few moments arrested to look into the window of a caricature shop. I had not been standing there many minutes, intermixed with several persons, when I heard from behind me a voice repeating, 'The Queen, the Queen,' which induced me to search with increased diligence throughout the caricatures in the window for one of the Queen, to which I had thought the voice from behind me had

alluded, but in which I was unsuccessful. At this moment, the various clocks beginning to strike six reminded me that unless I hastened forward I should be too late to see the royal ladies proceeding to their bathing machines. I immediately began to move on, still, nevertheless, keeping my eyes fixed upon the window in search of the Queen. I had not, however, taken two steps in that way, without looking before me, when I felt that I had come in contact with a female, whom, to save her and myself from falling, I encircled with my arms. At the same moment, having observed that the person whom I had so embraced was a little old woman, with a small black silk bonnet, exactly similar to those now worn by poor and aged females, and that the remainder of her person was covered by a short, plain, scarlet cloth cloak, I exclaimed, 'Hallo, old lady, I very nearly had you down.' In an instant I felt the old lady push me from her with energy and indignation, and I was seized by a great number of persons, who grasped me tightly by the arms and shoulders, whilst a tall, stout fellow, in a scarlet livery, stood close before my face, sharply striking the pavement with the heavy ferrule of a long golden-headed cane, his eyes flashing fire, and loudly repeating: 'The Queen, the Queen, the Queen, sir!'

"'Where? where? where?' I loudly retorted.

"'I am the Queen!' sharply exclaimed the old lady."

The gallant colonel, aghast, fell on his knees, and seizing the hem of the Queen's dress pressed it to his lips "after the German fashion," while he stammered out the best apology he could think of on such short notice. But the Queen, "though much offended, and certainly not without cause, softened her irritated features," and said:

"No, no, no, you may kiss my hant. We forgiff; you must be more careful; fery rute—fery rute, inteet; we forgiff—there, you may go."

Whereupon, exit our colonel, loudly cheered by the mob.

One night during Landmann's stay, when the regiment had marched by, General Garth complimented the King on his sash. The King, with his left hand taking up the ends that were hanging down, observed: "Yes, yes; this is a very handsome sash—very handsome—very handsome; quite new. Charlotte makes all my sashes—all my sashes; she always makes them." Then dropping the ends of the sash he at the same time dropped his

white glove, which he had taken off. Forthwith every one who stood near scrambled for the glove, but the King, "desirous of recovering his fellow glove without having any one to thank for it or perhaps wishing to display his activity, also attempted to seize it in which he succeeded. On rising, the King's cane slipped from his hold, and again he was the successful candidate for the prize." In the scuffle off fell the royal hat, "for the capture of which an increased number of competitors presented themselves, whose ambition to serve his Majesty greatly retarded its restoration." At last the hat was rescued from the hands of members of the King's household, who were struggling with each other for its possession, and the King held out his hands for it, his face as red as his coat with stooping. "Never mind about the honour of the thing," he exclaimed; "never mind; never mind. Give me my hat; give me my hat; there, there," as he received his hat. "Thank you, thank you all alike—you all picked it up—yes, yes—all, all, all—you all picked it up."

So smiling, chattering, heedless of the malady that will so soon deprive him of sense and memory, the homely King bows himself away.

Two years later, that merry little being, "pepper-hot," Charlotte of Wales, was at Weymouth.

That was the month of her flight, on being summoned peremptorily by the Regent to take up her abode at Carlton House. Her grandfather was then "as mad as puss." Slipping out from Warwick House into the street unnoticed, she called a hackney coach from the stand, and in that shabby vehicle drove post haste to the mother from whom she feared a lasting separation was decreed. The coachman swore, if pursued, to protect her and smash the Duke of York's head "to a bun"—for the sympathy of the people was with the two royal ladies, and when the Princess drove out, cries followed her from the crowd of "God bless you, but never forsake your mother." In the end father and uncle were victors; the unhappy Caroline left England for ever and the wilful, impetuous princess was sent down to Weymouth.

She was a winsome little person, though we are told she disfigured herself by wearing her bodice so short that she literally had no waist. Her feet were very pretty, and so were her hands and arms, and her ear, and the shape of her head. "She

will captivate many a heart or I am much mistaken," says a not very friendly observer.

During her stay she greatly pleased the good people of Weymouth, and they fêted her loyally with references to "your august grandfather, the paternal sovereign of a grateful people," and an illumination, "the most grand and brilliant scene of the kind ever witnessed at Weymouth." When she went for a sail, crowds of spectators received her on the quay, and we are told gravely that "the band of the 13th Light Dragoons striking up 'God save the King' at the moment of her landing, and the band of the 39th foot playing at the same time 'Rule Britannia,' produced an indescribable effect." *Arch. B. 2. 1. 1.*

The next year Charlotte was again at Weymouth. The quarrel this time was anent a husband. The Regent wanted her to marry the young Prince of Orange, who had been educated at Oxford, and expressly trained for the post. But Charlotte refused to go with the Prince "to his own Dutch land." "Marry, I will," she cried, "and that directly, in order to enjoy my liberty; but not the Prince of Orange. I think him so ugly that I am sometimes obliged to turn away my head in disgust when he is speaking to me." Yet the Prince was personable enough.

Lady Charlotte Bury thought she went to the root of the matter when she wrote: "I believe there is more of the *woman* in her than of the queen, and that she wants to get a look at another prince or two before she makes her choice of a husband." But the Princess had already given her heart to Leopold of Coburg, the hero of Connenrai.

One incident of this visit excited satire and comment. The "Leviathan," of 74 guns, being under sail, brought to and fired a salute to the royal standard which was flying from the Princess's yacht. The captain forthwith went on board to pay his loyal respects, and the Princess expressed a desire to look over the "Leviathan." The Bishop of Salisbury, her tutor, who had "no more knowledge of mankind than was to be acquired in the quadrangle of a college, where he had passed much of his life," suggested that the Regent might not like his daughter to go on such a rough sea in an open boat. He was met with the quick reply: "Queen Elizabeth took great delight in her navy, and she never entertained any fear of going on board a man-of-war in an open boat, in whatever state the sea might be; why then should

I? I am not only desirous, but determined, to inspect the 'Leviathan.'" To will was to execute with the Princess. The captain's barge came alongside the man-of-war, the yards were manned, and a chair of state was let down to hoist the royal visitor on board. "I prefer going on board in the manner that a seaman does," she exclaimed quickly. "When I am on deck the chair may be let down for the bishop and *the other ladies*"—an ambiguous statement that was construed against the bishop.

"He shrank aghast with awe,
While British seamen cheered her spirit."

The Princess left Weymouth in November. A year later she was dead. "She was amiable and would have become wise, but she was young, and in the flower of her youth the despoiler came."

My Child's Eyes.

My child has eyes like some sweet summer night,
Vastly, profoundly, celestially blue ;
Starlit with star thoughts virginally true,
That pierce the deepest dark with faith and light.

My child has eyes like some secluded shrine,
Accustomed to all holy things and pure ;
Where prayers are offered for poor sinners' cure,
And knees are bent to worship the divine.

My child has eyes like some glad day of feast,
Rising superb like the sun in the east ;
Full of the clash and the clang of the throng,
Joyous and lusty, gentle and strong.

My child has eyes like some soft roseate dawn,
Misty with dreams futurity reveals ;
Hushed and expectant, till mysterious steals
The potent presage of the day new born.

My child has eyes like some cool healing hand
That calms all fevers by its subtle powers ;
Comforting like silence, fragrant like flowers,
Or a flowing stream in an arid land.

My child has eyes like some eternal loss,
Shadowing life's journey with the fatal cross ;
Pointing out stern duties, and the noblest goal,
Through her sad eyes pouring treasures of her soul.

MY CHILD'S EYES.

My child has eyes like some triumphant cry
That spurs man on to battle and to fight ;
That arms him with true courage and proud might,
And makes men heroes who will dare and die !

My child has eyes like all sweet things that be :
A psalm of praise, a flower, the summer skies.
All that is good shines out from her clear eyes,
As all things pure in her sweet soul must be.

ETHEL M. DE FONBLANQUE.

A Bomburg Beauty.

A NOVEL.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

Author of "A CRACK COUNTY," "MATRON OR MAID," "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S HEART," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SUPERIOR BEING.

MADAME ARNOLDSSEN was a famous prima-donna, who, having been deprived of her voice by old age, and of her fortune by a succession of disastrous speculations, had taken to reciting, and now earned new laurels in a branch of art different from that to which she had been accustomed. Her misfortunes and fortitude predisposed the public in her favour. People thought it a gallant thing for an old woman between sixty and seventy to recommence the struggle for a competence, added to which she possessed decided talent.

Anyway, she proved a success ; and wherever she went, folk flocked to listen to her. On the present occasion she had secured, for a couple of nights, a large newly-built theatre prior to its opening season.

So great was the prestige attaching to Madame Arnoldsens name, that every box was taken, nearly every seat retained beforehand. When Sir Archibald MacIntyre and Hetty presented themselves at the ticket-office, they experienced much difficulty in securing places. All the best ones were engaged, and they had to be content with what in England represents the pit. Hetty's object was simply to see the body of the house from a point of observation where she herself was likely to remain unnoticed ; and once satisfied that this was achieved, she cared little where she sat. At her request, Sir Archibald hired a pair of opera-glasses, and with these she scanned the audience critically. Her heart palpitated to such a degree, that it was quite a relief not to find Karl and Mademoiselle La Perla at the first attempt. She almost

hoped now that they would not come. Her nerves hardly felt equal to the shock. After all, Sir Archibald might have been right when he assured her that in some cases doubt was preferable to certainty. Now she had a germ of hope left. If she saw them together, it would vanish, leaving a black gulf of misery which never could be spanned. She felt the crucial moment was at hand, and repented of her precipitate action. Ah! if she had only not gone into the Palm-house! What fatal attraction made her turn her steps towards it? Had she but wandered along the streets or the promenade, she might have been happy still. For looking back on her former state, when compared with her present one, it appeared like perfect bliss.

Regrets, however, were vain. Once set the ball of fate rolling, and nothing can stop it.

Hetty's meditations were cut short by the lifting of the curtain, and Madame Arnoldsén stepped on to the stage with a tragic grace which over forty years' acquaintance with the boards had taught her to cultivate. She was a tall, commanding-looking woman, her face and figure built on fine lines that gave them an air of nobility which recalled traces of her former queen-like beauty. A storm of applause greeted the appearance of the world-renowned prima-donna. Some came to see her out of curiosity, but more from old associations, and these clapped her to the echo. She bowed repeatedly, coughed once or twice, applied a glass of water to her lips, and began to recite in a low guttural voice which at once produced an impression on her audience.

But she had not pronounced half a dozen lines before it became evident that some counter-attraction was temporarily presenting itself to the public gaze. A slight, almost imperceptible, stir ran through the house, and looking up, Hetty perceived the cause. That darling of the people—at all events of the masculine portion—Mademoiselle La Perla, accompanied by a mighty cavalier, had just entered a large box on the grand tier.

Involuntarily Hetty uttered a cry of anguish, which aroused Sir Archibald's attention. His eyes followed the direction of hers, whilst his shaggy brows contracted in a heavy frown.

"Damn the woman!" he muttered behind his thick white moustache. "She has plenty of victims. Why can't she leave that big fool alone? There are no dollars to be got out of him, and he's breaking his wife's heart."

Meantime Karl gallantly proceeded to divest La Perla of her cloak. As he did so, that lady smiled up into his fresh-coloured face in a way which sent a sharp stab quivering through Hetty's frame. She saw Karl flush with pleasure and whisper something into his companion's ear. She nodded her head, and then he brought the chairs close together, so that they sat in regular lover-like proximity. He trifled quite familiarly with her handkerchief and fan, which rested on the velvet rim of the box, and once even raised the former to his nostrils, as if inhaling its perfume. Not a movement was lost upon Hetty, who sat and watched her rival in a kind of painful absorption which rendered her indifferent to everything else. In her eyes, the celebrated actress looked old, and fat, and common. She could not imagine what charm Karl found in that powdered, painted face, with its basilisk eyes and sensuous mouth. And yet the opera-glass of almost every man present was withdrawn from the stately form of Madame Arnoldsen, and levelled at this coarse and vulgar woman. The fact did not escape Hetty's observation, and she concluded that Mademoiselle La Perla must possess some attraction beyond her powers of comprehension, and in which she—Hetty—was deficient. With a grave and painful interest she continued to study the lady whose good fortune it was to please Karl, vaguely hoping that she might learn from her certain tricks of fascination.

Once or twice Sir Archibald endeavoured to distract her attention by making some trivial, commonplace remark.

She did not seem to hear him, and vouchsafed no answer. She sat quite tense and rigid, her eyes fixed on the couple in the box, whilst her face wore a strained expression of unutterable misery. A sudden moisture dimmed Sir Archibald's vision every time he strove to take a furtive glance at her. She was so pale and yet so pretty. Compare the two women! Faugh! his blood tingled at the very thought. The one was as a white lamb slaughtered on the hymeneal altar, the other a fiend incarnate, who lured men on to destruction just to gratify her wicked pleasure. If he had not been so angry with Karl, he could almost have found it in his heart to feel sorry for him. Already two of La Perla's lovers had committed suicide from rage, jealousy, and despair. What signified their deaths? They were a good advertisement, and enhanced the actress's reputation.

All through the performance, Karl and his companion sat

smiling at and chattering to each other. He was the favourite of the hour, and their manner was so exceedingly confidential that it left little doubt as to the intimacy of their relations. Hetty had seen enough to confirm her worst suspicions. She lost count of the time. It might have been an hour, a year, since she entered the theatre for aught she knew. It was such a wretched experience to sit there and watch her husband—hers, her very own, as she had thought—make love to another woman. There was something so dream-like and unreal about the whole proceeding, that even now she could scarcely believe the evidence of her eyes. She kept saying to herself, "No, it is not true. It can't be true. I must have something odd the matter with me. Very likely I am suffering from nightmare. Let me think, what did I eat for dinner? Only a plain pudding and some bread-and-butter. I ought not to feel so queer after it, but yet I do. Karl will be coming home soon. He must never know how hungry I am—yes, how hungry I am very often." And then she pinched her arm quite hard, to find out if it were really a dream and she had gone to sleep.

But, reason with herself as she might, nothing brought any comfort. Deep down in her heart she knew all the time that what she witnessed was no dream, but stern reality.

By-and-by she heard a tremendous clapping of hands going on around, and Sir Archibald's voice, raised louder than its wont, saying:

"Come, my dear, we had better be taking our departure. The performance is all over."

She started to her feet with a great sigh of relief. It was as if she had escaped from some baneful spell.

"All over! Oh, what a blessing! I am so tired—so tired. Do let us make haste and get home." And in a dazed, bewildered sort of way she pushed on to the outer passages, leaving the kind old gentleman to follow as best he could. He had not spent a very pleasant evening, but he forgave her. In a few minutes they reached a large vestibule, which was already thronged with people awaiting their carriages.

"Do you mind staying here for a second or two by yourself?" asked Sir Archibald. "I will go and find a fly to take us straight to the station, and have ordered a nice little supper at my house when we get back to Homburg."

"Do I mind?" she echoed, with the weariness of utter despair. "No, certainly not. I mind nothing."

He looked at her and shook his head. Somehow he would have preferred her not taking the matter quite so quietly. He would rather have seen her rage and storm. This dejected resignation puzzled and alarmed him. It did not seem natural. He almost feared that her brain might give way under the strain. But he kept his thoughts to himself.

"All right," he said. "Wait here, and I will be back very soon."

Sir Archibald had scarcely gone before, in spite of Hetty's assertion, every pulse in her body began to throb with fierce excitement. Towering high above the crowd, she caught sight of Karl's magnificent form. He was coming towards her. In another moment he would see her, and La Perla hung on his arm—that arm to which she had a prescriptive right. Acting on a sudden impulse, for which afterwards she could not account, and even regretted, Hetty shrank behind one of the splendid marble pillars that adorned the hall. By some strange coincidence, the couple whom she desired to avoid came to a halt immediately in front of it. Hetty leant her back against the cool, polished support. How dreadful it felt having to hide from her own husband. She wished she were dead.

"Karl," she overheard La Perla say, "you are coming to supper with me to-night, of course?"

He bowed a pleased assent.

"I expect the Crown Prince of Hohenmandenheim Von Gustenburg. He has promised to honour my poor rooms this evening, and I have a few choice spirits asked to meet him. You are amongst the number. What pleasure should I have without my Karl?" and she cast a languishing glance at her muscular companion.

"You are too good, too kind," he murmured, with a delighted smile.

"On the contrary, I do not see enough of you. Is it imperative that you should return to Homburg to-morrow?"

He shrugged his massive shoulders.

"What will you? It is my misfortune to possess a wife, and one who fancies herself in love with me."

"Hush! do not talk so loud. Some one will hear, and

your remark sounds a trifle—well, just a trifle conceited. And so the poor little wife is fond of you, is she? I pity her!"

"Very much fonder than I deserve. Nevertheless, I do not see why your compassion should be excited in such a degree."

This he said stiffly. It did not take much to rouse his masculine vanity.

La Perla laughed lightly.

"She must be an inoffensive sort of person. Anyhow, she does not seem to give much trouble."

"No, thank God," he answered emphatically. "She is charmingly submissive and delightfully ignorant."

"And yet you do not return her love. Take my advice, my dear friend: keep her meek and ignorant as long as you can."

"I fully intend to. You see, Corina"—he called her by her Christian name—"my marriage has turned out a great failure. It is not exactly my wife's fault. She is pretty, and I don't dislike her, but—I thought she would be rich, and instead——"

"And instead," she interrupted, "you found her poor, and so your love vanished. I understand it all. She is too good for you, and so you don't appreciate her. Oh, you naughty, fickle Karl!" And La Perla shook her head playfully.

He flushed scarlet to the temples. She exercised a strange power over him.

"You have no right to call me fickle—you, whom I adore, and whose image is never absent from my mind. Ah, Corina! why did I not know you soon enough, so that I could have married you legally——".

"*Merci, mon cher,*" she interposed pertly, "it takes two to make a bargain. As a lover you are perfection, but as a husband you would bore me to death. I like to be my own mistress, and I know from experience that men are only civil to a woman when they have no right to domineer over her. Once give them power, and they misuse it. It is not for nothing that I have lived. I am devoted to your sex, but—I distrust it." And with a mocking laugh she pressed the arm of her admirer, and the pair passed on.

Very soon afterwards Sir Archibald returned. He found Hetty staggering up against the marble column like one bereft of sense. She breathed heavily, her eyes were dilated and had a

fixed, vacant look in them, her face was without a vestige of colour, and she trembled in every limb.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, horrified by her appearance. "What is the matter, Frau Von Kessler?"

"Take me home—take me home!" she moaned. "Oh, how I wish I had never come!"

Sir Archibald did not ask a single question. He happened to have met Karl and La Perla going out, and he knew enough as it was. So he put Hetty into a cab, and told the driver to stop at the first café he passed by. Arrived there, he purchased a glass of brandy, which he literally forced down his companion's throat.

She sighed, choked, and then sighed again. Coming back to life was very painful. But the hot spirit recalled her to a sense of the situation, and above all of Sir Archibald's kindness. She was not so used to the latter as not to be extremely sensitive to it. With a smile so faint and tremulous that it cut him to the quick, she laid her cold little hand on his and said: "Thank you very much. I am giving you a great deal of trouble. I"—trying hard to keep her voice steady—"am b—better now. The theatre was very warm, wasn't it?"

"Confoundedly warm," he assented.

And so they tacitly agreed to attribute her sudden indisposition to the heat, and to no other cause.

Good friend as Sir Archibald was, she could not bare her heart to him. Flimsy the screen might be that hid her hurt, but pride, instinct, and womanly feeling prevented its being swept away.

For what can a poor forsaken wife do? It is no use letting all the world into her confidence. The world can't give her back the illusions that are gone, restore the serenity that has departed, or make whole the heart that is broken. The world lives on and takes but little heed of such trifles as these. It has not even the power to return to a loving nature the treasures of trust and confidence robbed by some cruel hand.

No, the loss is irremediable, and she is a brave woman who, having once suffered it, still treads the narrow path of duty, and resolutely stifles every craving for affection.

In process of time she may cheat herself into believing that love is a delusion, and there are other things in life quite as

good. Sophistry though at best. Deep down in her heart is an ache which no special pleading will cure.

Perhaps men do not realize their cruelty, but they who can render a woman supremely happy or supremely miserable, and who make or mar her very soul, should at least recognize that matrimony is a state which has grave responsibilities. It is not all take and no give, as so many husbands seem to think. "*I may do whatever I like, but you're a woman, you're different,*" is a very convenient argument, but not altogether a convincing one, if the weaker vessel possess intelligence and reasoning powers.

No doubt she is better without them. They only teach her to see flaws in the superior being. And that is fatal to her peace and his vanity.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GOOD-BYE FOR EVER.

HAD Hetty been a fashionable dame, accustomed to the world and the world's wickedness, the probabilities are it would never have occurred to her to treat Karl's defection seriously. If he chose to go his way, all the better; it left her free to go hers. This is the modern philosophy of married life, as exemplified every day in society; and no doubt, where both parties thoroughly understand the system, it works well.

But unluckily for our heroine, she was a simple, inexperienced, little person, and when she heard from her husband's lips that he adored another woman, then it seemed to her as if existence were no longer supportable, and that henceforth all must be at an end between them.

She had not yet learnt the chief duty of a discreet wife, namely, to shut her eyes diplomatically to the sundry peccadilloes of her lord, and endure with amiable tolerance every eccentricity of conduct in which he may choose to indulge. Hetty's education had been sadly neglected in this respect.

Above the chaos of thought which seethed in her brain, one decision alone stood out sharp and clear. She could not, and she would not, go on living in the same house with Karl. He had outraged her holiest and most sacred feelings, and converted their marriage into a mockery. The sooner it ceased the better, for once shorn of love, how hideous, cruel, and repulsive did the life-

long union of two people become. Thus thinking, there came surging over her spirit a great wave of home-sickness. She was seized by a sudden longing to obtain her father's and mother's forgiveness, and to return to the safe, if somewhat quiet, haven of Murchiston Hall. She seemed to smell the fragrance of the sweet June roses, to see the brilliant flower-beds on the smooth lawn, looking like pieces from a kaleidoscope, and to be sitting under the cedar-tree, impatiently kicking away the brown needles at her feet. Only about ten months had passed since she had left England, and yet what an eternity it appeared! A perfect soul-hunger devoured her to revisit her native country, to behold the dear familiar fields, with their fresh budding hedges. *They* would welcome her, but would her parents prove equally kind?

"If I am very humble, and own the folly of my ways," she mused in bitter self-abasement; "if I promise to be their devoted slave for the rest of my life, and never to see Karl again, surely—oh! surely then they will relent. It is dreadful to be punished always for one false step. Even very hard people must have a soft corner somewhere. Anyhow, I can but try."

The project took such strong hold of her imagination, that whilst the train whirled them back to Homburg she perfected every detail of a plan which it was her purpose to put into execution on the morrow. If the thing were to be done at all, it must be done at once; but again she needed help to carry out her designs. When they reached the station, Sir Archibald was quite surprised to see the mute companion whom he thought asleep step briskly out on to the platform, and still more so when, without the slightest demur, she agreed to go to his house for supper.

"It is my only chance," she said to herself. "I must make the effort, no matter what it costs. But to beg twice in one day! Could anything be more horrible, more revolting to one's feelings? Feelings! Pshaw! I haven't got any."

Meantime the old gentleman, little guessing his companion's thoughts, was delighted and astonished at the change in her. She held her head erect, and no longer looked like a white crushed daisy, trodden into the very earth; now she showed symptoms of returning spirit. The passivity which alarmed him so much at first had vanished, giving place to a totally different demeanour.

Hetty's eyes glittered feverishly, and a bright spot of hectic colour burnt on either cheek; but Sir Archibald hailed these tokens of excitement with secret relief, little guessing what they purported. He imagined that the first shock was passing away without having inflicted any permanent injury. At least, so he tried to believe.

Old Madame Berger, his housekeeper, soon put supper on the table, and trotted about in attendance whilst Hetty and her master discussed the various dishes. For oh! wonder of youth! Hetty was miserable, she was broken-hearted, but nevertheless she had a downright healthy appetite. Mechanically she swallowed the food heaped on her plate, vaguely conscious that it did her good, although she had no notion what she was eating.

"I shall need all my strength—I shall need all my strength," she kept saying to herself.

Presently Madame Berger left the room. Directly the housekeeper had gone, Hetty laid down her knife and fork, leant both elbows on the table, and looking at Sir Archibald with a sidelong glance, said abruptly:

"You have done me one favour already to-day. Don't think me ungrateful, but now I want you to do me another—a much bigger favour."

"Certainly, my dear," he responded readily, pleased that she should so far depart from her reserve as to ask his aid. "In what way can I be of service to you? You have only to say the word."

So deeply was his heart touched by her forlorn position, that at the present moment he felt ready to make any sacrifice for her sake.

"It's an odious request," she replied, whilst a hot blush suffused her entire countenance. "I can hardly bring myself to make it."

"Tut, tut! Don't stand on ceremony with me."

"I don't know what you'll think of me, Sir Archibald."

"I shall always think the same of you, my dear. If it's any consolation to you to hear it, nothing can alter my regard, and I may add—my affection. If I had a daughter she could not be much dearer to me."

Hetty's eyes filled with tears. She clasped his hand, and kissed it impulsively.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "How I wish you were my father. I should never have felt frightened of you."

"In that case, tell me what you want."

"I want you," she began in a tremulous voice, "to—to lend me some—money." She uttered the last word reluctantly, and with evident shame.

Sir Archibald laughed. The commonplace nature of the demand lifted quite a load of care from his heart. He had fancied she was going to ask him to interfere between her and Karl, or even enlighten her as to the divorce laws.

"You wish me to lend you some money? Why, of course. Nothing could possibly be easier."

"Ah, but you do not understand. I must explain that circumstances may prevent my paying it back for some time. I—I am going away from here to-morrow."

"Going away!" he ejaculated, fairly astounded by the intelligence. "Is not this resolve on your part very sudden?"

"Yes, it is, rather, but I have not been well lately, and I feel as if a change would do me good."

"No doubt, no doubt. But where are you going?"

"To my father and mother," she answered, with a vivid blush. "It is a long time since I have seen them."

"But I thought that you had quarrelled."

"They quarrelled with me on account of my marriage," said Hetty sadly. "Looking back, I begin to see that I was to blame, and they had just cause for their anger. I mean to tell them so, and then perhaps they may forgive me."

"Have your parents written to you at all of late?" he inquired.

"No."

"Or sent you any kind messages through a friend?"

"I have not heard a single word from them since they left Homburg last summer."

Sir Archibald looked grave.

"My dear," he said, "it seems to me you are running a very considerable risk."

"I know I am. But what else can I do?"

He thought for a moment. The good man had not the least idea that in leaving home Hetty intended wishing good-bye to her husband for ever. On the whole he approved of her determination. A critical time was coming. In the little lodgings at the Schöne-Aussicht, he was aware there were not many comforts to be obtained, and lastly, it was the most natural thing in the world

her desiring a reconciliation with Mr. and Mrs. Davidson before the birth of her child. Added to which very excellent reason, Karl had undoubtedly given his wife serious cause for offence, and in all probability nothing would so quickly serve to soften the bitterness of her feelings as a temporary absence. Then, too, when people heard that Frau Von Kessler was visiting her parents, no one could speak an evil word against the young wife. Yes, on the whole, Sir Archibald approved of Hetty's intention, although it had certainly taken him by surprise.

"Well," he said, after a somewhat prolonged pause, "perhaps you are right—perhaps you are right. And as for the sinews of war, there's no difficulty about that part of the business. I will gladly furnish them, and give you just as long credit as ever you like." Upon which he unlocked a bureau that stood in a corner near the window, and took out a bagful of money from a drawer.

"How much will you have?" he asked carelessly. "Thirty, forty, fifty pounds?"

Hetty made a rapid mental calculation.

"I think if you would give me ten——" she said timidly.

"Ten! Nonsense, why, that's nothing. Here, take this."

And he tried to force a handful of gold upon her acceptance.

But she shrank back, and met his gaze with honest, steadfast eyes.

"No, Sir Archibald. You are kindness itself; but even from you I cannot accept a larger sum than I hope some day to be able to repay. Give me fifteen pounds. If the worst comes to the worst, my watch and personal ornaments will realize that."

"If the worst comes to the worst," he repeated gruffly, as a means of hiding his emotion. "What are you talking about?"

She smiled in a melancholy sort of way. Sir Archibald's acquaintance with her parents was very slight, and it was impossible to shut her eyes to the fact that if, on her arrival in England, they still remained obdurate, her position would be a most precarious—not to say desperate—one.

Nevertheless, an irresistible influence urged her to fly from Karl. She felt as if she could no longer look into his face, or endure the intimacy of their home life. It could only be carried on in future by a base hypocrisy on his part, and by an unnatural control on hers. She was not strong enough to hide her grief, her disgust, her love. It was better to part quietly and without

a scene. Recriminations could not affect the position. She had sense enough to know this. Hers was not one of those natures capable of carrying on a tooth-and-claw struggle. Once wounded, and like a stricken animal she sought refuge in solitude, and bore her hurt silently. Only she pined. Just at present she was sustained by a false courage—the courage of despair. All she prayed was that it might last until she encountered her father's stern gaze. A shiver ran through her frame at the thought of him, but, like a gambler threatened by ruin, she was resolved to stake all on one last cast of the die.

The money for her journey obtained, she took an affectionate leave of Sir Archibald, and returned to her own modest quarters.

Katinka had long since gone to bed, and she let herself quietly in with a latch-key. She was very tired, both mentally and physically, and yet she took no rest. There was much to be done first. With her own hands she dragged out her empty box from a closet, and began systematically packing it. A photograph of Karl stood on the chest of drawers. She snatched it up, pressed it passionately to her lips, then deliberately tore it into tiny fragments. But the fair blond face escaped destruction and lay staring at her from the floor. Those wide-open eyes seemed to reproach her. Her heart was like lead. No, she could not go without something by which to remember him. She stooped down, picked up the dismembered head of her false, handsome husband, and carefully put it into a gold locket which she frequently wore. Then she passed into his dressing-room. There was a shirt hanging on a peg behind the door, which she had promised to mend and had forgotten until this moment. She went back, fetched her work-basket, and began diligently to sew on buttons. A curious instinct prompted her to leave everything in order. Far into the dawn she sat, cold and cheerless, darning his stockings and tidying his drawers. It was a last labour of love, strongly blended with pain. At length, when the rosy tints of morn gradually dispersed the grey mists of night, she succumbed for an hour or two to sheer bodily fatigue, and throwing herself on her bed, slept uneasily. But at seven o'clock she was awake again, and sitting down, wrote the following farewell note to Karl, explaining the cause of her departure:—

"I was at Madame Arnoldsens's recital yesterday. I saw you

and Mademoiselle La Perla there, and heard all that passed between you in the vestibule, whilst you were waiting for your carriage. Oh! Karl, why did you leave me to find out in so cruel a manner that your love was not mine, but another's? You have never loved me. I know it now when too late, and the knowledge has broken my heart. I was so fond of you—I would have done anything in the world for you—but—it is useless talking of myself. Facts are facts. I cannot make you care for me, and I love you too well to render you unhappy by my presence. You will feel freer, more at your ease, without me, and at least you need no longer dissemble. So I am going away, Karl—going away, and shall never trouble you again. Good-bye, my husband. You have given me terrible pain, but may God watch over you for ever."

Then at the bottom of the page, blurred and smudged by fast falling tears, she added:

"I have mended all your clothes. Katinka must look after them in future."

She was so engaged on her task that she did not see her little servant enter the room. That worthy maiden stood thunder-struck as she gazed from the open box to Hetty's wet and haggard face.

"Are you—are you going on a journey?" she inquired in dismay.

Hetty pulled herself together with a start.

"Yes," she said, trying to conceal the signs of her grief. "I am obliged to leave home suddenly, and whilst I am away, Katinka, I want you, like a good girl, to do all you can to make Herr Von Kessler comfortable."

"Humph!" grunted Katinka. "He knows how to do that for himself."

"Never mind. See that he wants for nothing. In this way you will best serve me."

"Ah! I would do anything in the world for you," cried the girl impulsively.

Hetty kissed Katinka's plump, rosy face. Her sympathy and affection were indeed precious.

"Good Katinka!" she murmured gratefully. "You have been a kind friend to me many a time. I don't know what I should have done without you. Promise me to do your duty when I am

gone, just as if I were here. Then I shall feel easier in my mind, and know that Herr Von Kessler is being well looked after."

"Oh!" cried Katinka, "don't go away—don't go away."

"I must," said Hetty sadly.

"Then at least tell me when I may expect you back again."

"I don't know, Katinka. It depends on circumstances. And now dry your eyes like a good girl, and listen to what I have to say. When Herr Von Kessler comes home to-night, be sure and give him this note. Don't forget."

"No, Madame. He shall have it the instant he arrives."

"And what about his dinner, Katinka? I shan't be able to go marketing this morning, but you might let him have boiled mutton with turnips. That is always a favourite dish of his, and one which he enjoys."

Katinka made no reply. She could only sob. It was a terrible blow losing her mistress in this unexpected manner, and her grief was all the sharper since instinct told her that she was leaving home because she was unhappy, and Herr Von Kessler had a great deal to do with the matter.

"The brute!" she said to herself viciously, doubling up her purple fists. "I could knock him down. He is a thoroughly bad man. Ah! yes, I know—I hear what is said in the town. The rascal is driving my dear saint away, and I am to be left alone with him. But I won't stay—I won't stay even to please her. I have too much respect for my character."

Very soon came the hour of parting. Katinka cried freely, and Hetty very nearly broke down also. The uncertainty of the future created a sense of uneasiness against which she struggled in vain. Would she ever come back or see her husband again? If Karl had appeared at that moment, uttered a few words of penitence and contrition, and begged her to return to her home, she would gladly have done so. But no Karl came to dissuade her from the step she was about to take. He was still dangling after Mademoiselle La Perla. Hetty had unconsciously hoped he might appear. But now it was too late. The engine hissed, the wheels turned, and slowly the train moved out of the station.

Then she sank back on her seat, whilst an annihilating sense of helplessness crushed her spirit.

It was over. She no longer had any choice. The hand of fate was driving her onward, firmly and relentlessly. It might

be for good ; it might be for evil—she could not tell. Destiny gripped her hard. She was utterly powerless.

This conviction after a time dulled the sharp edge of her pain, and produced a strangely passive state. She became numb and torpid. Since yesterday she had gone through so much, that she felt as if the limits of human suffering had been reached. A certain deadness of sensation, the result of physical fatigue added to nervous tension, brought temporary relief.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ADrift UPON THE WORLD.

THE journey seemed endless. Wishing to travel economically, Hetty took a second-class ticket, and for the greater part of the night she was obliged to sit bolt upright, wedged in between a fat German gentleman on either side. To add to her discomfort, one of them smoked most perseveringly, and insisted on keeping the window religiously shut. Before long the atmosphere became unendurable, but it was in vain that Hetty coughed and choked. Her phlegmatic companion refused to lay aside his pipe or take a hint, and he continued to puff out whiff after whiff of strong tobacco, with a stolid selfishness closely akin to brutality.

How interminable were the weary hours, with their alternate spells of uncomfortable dozing and restless wakefulness ! Every limb in Hetty's body ached. The seat grew harder and harder, whilst her back and that of the compartment appeared momentarily to suit each other less and less well. She could not even rest her feet on the cushions opposite, or indulge in the luxury of stretching her legs. There was no relief from the one cramped and intolerable position. Never had she suffered so much bodily as during that journey. Little by little a deadly lassitude overpowered every other sense ; and ever the train rolled on, on, on—now dashing past insignificant country stations, again pulling up for a few minutes before some important town.

By the time they reached Calais, Hetty felt sick and faint from sheer fatigue ; but the fresh air revived her somewhat as she stepped out on to the platform. The lights of the harbour glimmered uncertainly. A few faint streaks of dawn quivered over the horizon and caused the pale stars to disappear one by one. The steamer's dark funnels and rigging showed indistinctly

against a tumbled grey sky loaded with great masses of cumulus cloud, driven forward by a boisterous wind, which churned the smooth water near the pier into little white-crested waves.

Hetty shivered, drew her shawl closer round her, and hurrying on board gladly sought refuge in the ladies' cabin. Oh! the relief of a red velvet couch all to oneself, and of being able to lie down at full length after so many hours spent in a crowded railway compartment! Long before the steamer started she was fast asleep, sleeping the dreamless sleep of absolute exhaustion.

The passage proved extremely rough, and many were the sufferers in consequence, but their groans and gurgles produced no effect whatever on the weary young wife. She only awoke when the stewardess, enforcing the words by a slight shake, said, in her hearty English voice:

"Time to get up! We are at Dover."

Then Hetty yawned, rose reluctantly, and followed the eager passengers, who very shortly began to troop on shore. It was delightful to hear English everywhere spoken, and to see the sturdy, red-bearded guards. They looked so homelike, and seemed quite familiar friends. Directly the train had fairly started she put her head out of the window, and felt as if she could never tire of gazing at the green fields, with their dark lines of intersecting hedges. What a charm they lent to the landscape! How they relieved it from flatness and barrenness! After all, there was no country like England. For a time such thoughts predominated, but when they reached Victoria, she was obliged to battle with the inertness that paralyzed her mind and to meditate seriously on what plan of action she should adopt. She was well nigh worn out; nevertheless, she felt she could not rest until the entire journey was over. A feverish longing to know the worst goaded her on, and rendered her temporarily impervious to bodily sensations of exhaustion. She disregarded them completely, and was too anxious and nervous to spare herself in any way. So she asked an obliging porter to find out how the trains ran to Manchester.

He told her that an express left St. Pancras shortly before ten o'clock. Consequently she drove there, hastily swallowed a cup of tea and piece of bread-and-butter, and a quarter of an hour before its departure was once more safely seated in the train. Her head ached, and her eyes felt strained and dizzy, but

she could not sleep. Her excitement increased to a painful pitch as she neared her destination. It was with the greatest difficulty that she forced herself to sit still. A horrible restlessness seized her—a growing apprehension as to the results of her unexpected return home. All sorts of projects presented themselves with reference to the best means of making her presence known to her father. Should she take him by surprise, or would it be best to approach him cautiously?

One thing alone was certain. She must wait until he had dined. Men were so much better-tempered after dinner than before. She had discovered this from experience. If it were necessary to break some disagreeable piece of news to Karl, she had always refrained from doing so until the pangs of hunger were fully satisfied. And even then he was often very cross, and she was aware that her husband and father possessed one idiosyncrasy in common. So when she arrived at Manchester, she took a fly, and drove to an inn situated in rather a remote part of the town. It was a quiet little place, where, she remembered, her mother had once put up the carriage during some shopping expedition. It now wanted a few minutes to four o'clock, and, asking for a bedroom and a can of hot water, she indulged in the comfort of a good wash, and then, partly unpacking her box, put on a fresh dress in place of the dusty garment that had done duty during the journey.

Her father, as she well knew, was a man who went a good deal by appearances; therefore she made a careful toilette, and, when finished, looked in a glass to judge of its effect. She uttered an exclamation of dismay. Was this pale, wan, haggard woman the same Hetty whose reflection she had seen only yesterday morning? It seemed impossible. The mirror offered but little consolation. She turned away from it, feeling a kind of shock which made sad inroads on her rapidly diminishing stock of courage.

Looks counted for so much in this world, and, unconsciously, she had relied upon them as a means of softening her father's heart. And now a single night had aged her ten years—robbed her cheeks of their bloom, and printed quite hard, ugly lines upon them. At least, so she imagined. For a moment she desponded; then, with a sort of savage energy, she vowed she would not give in, or brook defeat. Indeed, she did not dare contemplate the latter. It meant utter despair.

So she repacked her box, paid her modest bill, and chartered a fly to drive her out to Murchiston Hall. And now innumerable fears assailed her. Do what she would, she could not conquer them. They rose up like deadly foes on all sides, and reduced her already strained and shaken mind to chaos. As they left the noisy streets behind them and entered the quiet country lanes which she knew so well, as they passed by the peaceful villages basking in the clear April sun, and the fragrance of the budding hedgerows and growing grasses delicately scented the air with fresh, familiar odours, her heart began to beat so fiercely that the loud, uneven strokes of its pulsations dwarfed every other sound. Her nerves were strung to their highest limit. The suspense was almost more than she could bear after the excitement and fatigue of the preceding four-and-twenty hours.

At last the lodge gates loomed ahead, and the fly came to a halt. The situation was rapidly becoming unendurable, for to sit still and calmly let herself be driven up to the front door as an honoured guest was impossible. She had not the face to do it, with her father's angry parting words still ringing in her ears and indelibly engraven on her brain.

"Stop," she called hoarsely to the man on the box. "I will get out here." Then, with trembling fingers, she unclasped her purse, paid him his fare, and said, "You need not wait for me—I am not going back."

"What shall I do with your luggage, miss—I beg pardon—marm?" he asked.

"My luggage?" she repeated, in a bewildered tone. "Oh, you can leave it here, with the lodge-keeper."

The man nodded his head, and Hetty began to walk up the drive with quick, agitated steps. She had purposely cut off her means of retreat, so that the fortitude of desperation which had impelled her to leave Homburg might not disappear when the crucial moment arrived. How peaceful and beautiful everything looked, how strangely out of harmony with the stormy unrest which raged within her breast. Rooks cawed and circled round the tall elms that formed such a noble approach to the house. Their great arms met in an arch overhead, through which the darkening sky peeped pleasantly. The sun had set, but a golden glow still lingered in the west, though bars of purple stretched themselves across the horizon, and twilight was creeping on apace,

swallowing up certain sharp contrasts of light and shade, and reducing them to uniform greyness. Thrushes and blackbirds piped melodiously from their hidden nests. Lambs bleated in the park, their trembling notes travelling far on the still air; and slowly, distinctly, the church clock hard by rang out eight silvery chimes. The repose and homeliness of the scene sank deep into Hetty's heart, causing it to stir mysteriously. Its beauty was now apparent. Ten months ago she remembered how she had wearied of it all, how she had longed to spread her wings and fly out into the world! And now—and now—oh! it was pitiful to think what a ghastly failure her life was. She had no faith, no hope, no belief in man left. All—all had been taken from her; and here she was, a bankrupt, robbed both of joy and love, about to piteously beseech pardon from the parents whom she had incensed. For a moment it flashed across her brain how different would have been her lot had she married Lord Charles Mountgard. Like many a woman, she had staked her all on love, and lost.

But it would not do to dwell on these things now. Thought meant despair, and despair meant a horrible suggestion, which, ever since yesterday, she had tried to thrust from her resolutely.

Eight o'clock! The hour was well timed. Her parents were always accustomed to dine at half-past six, and, no doubt, they had made no change in their habits. A happy thought struck her. Befriended by the growing darkness, she would creep round to that side of the house where the dining-room was situated, and see her father and mother without herself being seen. Then she could tell what sort of a mood they were in, and whether she might venture to make her appeal. Very quietly and softly, gliding like a thief from tree to tree and from shrub to shrub, she stole cautiously up to the window, and with eager, expectant eyes looked through it out of the gathering gloom of evening into the light.

The two old people, each in a capacious arm-chair, sat on either side of the fireplace. The table was covered by a white cloth. Dessert-plates, glasses, and decanters were still upon it, and a large duplex lamp shed a mellow radiance around. Hetty's eye fell first upon her mother. She saw that she was dozing, and looked fat, sleek, and red as usual. Then, instinc-

tively, she turned towards her father, and realized with a sharp pang how terribly he was altered, and what grief she had occasioned. The impression he had left on her mind was that of a fine and comparatively robust man, well set up, stout of build, and stern almost to hardness. Instead, she saw a shrunken form, visibly wasted, sitting huddled up over the fire as if it were the depth of winter. And as she looked he stretched out his hands, and she noticed that they were lean and fleshless. The knuckles showed prominently, the joints seemed stiff and enlarged, and they had quite lost the breadth and massiveness which in her recollection had always characterized them. His face, too, was sadly changed. The temples were hollow, like those of an old horse; the grey hair, formerly so abundant, had grown very sparse and thin, displaying an unfamiliar extent of brow. His jaw dropped, after the fashion of extreme age, and rested tremulously on a chest once broad, now concave and contracted.

Involuntarily Hetty uttered an exclamation of pity. He looked so frail—so thin—so totally unlike the father of her thoughts, that all at once her fear vanished, and gave place to a huge compassion. Her whole heart went out towards him.

"Father—father!" she cried impulsively, beating against the window-pane. "Let me in! I want to come to you, oh! so badly!"

At the sound, he looked uneasily about the room, and rose with difficulty from his chair. Hetty could contain herself no longer, but tapped again—this time louder than before. Apparently the window, a long French one, had not been properly closed on the inside. Anyhow, it yielded to her pressure. Accepting this unlooked-for piece of good fortune as a joyful omen, she stepped forward and stood under the same roof with her parents.

Suddenly a look of anger and alarm stole over Mr. Davidson's face.

"Who are you?" he asked, in thick, hoarse utterances. "What brings you here?"

She laid her hand imploringly on his coat-sleeve.

"Father, don't you know me? I am Hetty—your daughter, come to ask forgiveness for having offended you."

"Hetty!" exclaimed Mrs. Davidson, waking up from her post-prandial slumbers, and looking at the altered face and form of

her only child with a dull, incredulous stare. "Hetty here—impossible!"

"Oh, mother! surely *you* recognize me?" said Hetty, in deep distress. "A few short months cannot have effaced my memory completely!"

"Lor! How you are changed! You have grown quite plain, and lost all your looks. We thought you were in Germany. What ever has brought you to England in this unexpected fashion?"

A cruel blush flamed up into Hetty's pale face. To confess her husband's infidelity was infinitely painful, especially to such unsympathetic listeners. But she had foreseen the ordeal and braced herself to meet it bravely.

"Karl does not care for me any longer," she answered, with concentrated bitterness. "He is in love with another woman—an actress, who gains her living by dancing breakdowns and singing indecent songs." Then her voice broke, and her calm giving way she added passionately, "I could not remain in the same house with him after that. It was as if I were going mad. I had lost everything in the world, and so—and so," she concluded tremulously, "I made up my mind to beg your forgiveness, and implore you to take me back as if nothing had ever happened. Oh! don't punish me any more! God knows I have suffered enough as it is."

And so saying, she glanced nervously at her father, but his rigid face offered no encouragement. Just at first it had seemed to soften a little, but the stern, set expression which had always inspired her with terror, quickly returned to it. His form might be bent and broken, but it was clear that the severe, inflexible spirit remained unchanged.

Her heart sank.

"Take you back as if nothing had ever happened?" he echoed sarcastically. "How can that be? Do you expect me to bring up Herr Von Kessler's offspring? What's done is done."

"The child is innocent," she pleaded.

"Maybe. But it will inherit its father's vices and its mother's folly. No amount of repentance can do away with the consequences of your act."

She hung her head. The truth of this hard speech sent an icy chill through her frame.

"When you married Karl Von Kessler, you ceased to be my

daughter," he went on, in cold harsh tones. "I told you so at the time, and I tell you so again. I wonder how you *dare* come into the house in this audacious manner, and force your presence upon me, just as if you had no pride, no self-respect or proper feeling left. You have broken my heart. Why should I forgive you? I am a perfect wreck. It is all your doing, and then you actually are impertinent enough to ask me to forget the past! I can't," he went on, with gathering passion. "Perhaps I am hard—perhaps I am vindictive—but I can't, and that's the truth."

A death-like pallor stole over her countenance. She put her hand on the back of the nearest chair, and leant against it for support. She had enough sympathy with this narrow nature, and knew its limitations sufficiently well, to recognize the futility of any appeal to his mercy. She was terribly agitated, and so, too, was he. All of a sudden the strength which had hitherto upheld him, and made him speak and act like his former self, gave way. He relapsed into a feeble, querulous old man, whose faculties seemed enveloped in a fog.

"Emma," he said complainingly, turning to his wife, "I have been very ill. I—I am not equal to this scene. The doctor says that excitement is bad for me. Make her go away—make her go away!" Then he paused, and his mind appeared to wander, for presently he continued brokenly, "My daughter Hetty was young and pretty—I was proud of her—very proud of her—and had set my heart on her making a great match. She was young and pretty, I tell you—young and pretty. I should know her in a thousand. And now this woman comes to me, and tells me she is Hetty—*my* Hetty! But I know better—Hetty never was white and old—she had auburn hair like burnished gold, and cheeks as soft and fair as an apple blossom, and great dark eyes that shone like stars! Ah! yes, I remember—I remember!—She has gone—left me! but I see her often in my dreams—in my dreams—in my dreams."

His voice died away into inarticulate mutterings.

Hetty shrank back with a feeling of vague terror. Had he lost his reason? Was this his normal condition? She turned to her mother with hollow eyes that asked for explanation.

"You had better go," whispered Mrs. Davidson. "Since his last attack he is often very queer, and hardly knows what he is saying. Perhaps some other time he may see you again for a

few minutes, but he has been greatly upset by your visit, and the doctor has warned me that any sudden excitement may prove fatal."

"But I have nowhere to go to," responded Hetty, lifting a white, frantic face to Mrs. Davidson's. "Haven't you heard? Don't you understand? I can't return to my husband. I have left him for ever, and—and," with tears of desperation rising to her eyes, "the baby may be born in another fortnight. I am without clothes, without money. Oh! father, mother," wringing her hands together, "surely you will not send me away to starve, to die? Have pity on me. If I have erred, I have been cruelly punished, for don't think that I am happy. A woman cannot love and be forsaken without enduring tortures. I entreat you not to refuse my request."

"Emma," said Mr. Davidson irritably, "why do you allow this woman to tease me? She has Hetty's voice, but she isn't the Hetty I used to know. She looks poor, and dowdy, and shabby. Give her twenty pounds—that is liberal, I am sure—and send her back to her husband."

"No, no," shrieked Hetty. "I can't go back. I won't go back. It is out of the question."

"Then you must provide for yourself. My little girl was pretty and cheerful. You are not like her. It only gives me pain to see you. Go away—go away."

His words and manner made her desist from further persuasion. Her courage ebbed before this wandering mind and imperfect recognition. They rendered argument useless.

"It is too late to return to Manchester," she said, with unnatural calm. "At least give me a bed for to-night. I have been travelling ever since yesterday morning and am quite worn out."

He looked at her, and into his stony heart there crept a sentiment of compunction. Was this really his Hetty—the child whom he had dandled on his knee, and of whom he had formerly been so proud? His enfeebled brain felt confused, but the old obstinacy remained, and was too strong to be overcome. He had spoken truly when he said that he could not yield—it was not in his nature.

"I swore you should never sleep under this roof again," he said, "and I am not a man to break my vows. Nevertheless, on account of your condition, I will have compassion on you. The

lodge-keeper's wife has a spare room. You can spend the night there." And he moved away as if to signify the discussion was at an end.

She turned towards the window by which she had entered, and a low sob of despair escaped from her lips.

"Father, mother," she said brokenly, "good-bye. I came to you in my great need, and you have repulsed me. May God forgive you. If evil comes of this—if you should live to be sorry for your harsh treatment of your only daughter—remember that you have but yourselves to blame." So saying, she passed out into the soft, enfolding darkness of the night. It swallowed up her tall young form, and hid her from view.

A look of strained and painful attention stole over the old man's face. He breathed hard.

"Has she gone?" he asked of his wife.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Davidson, "she has gone."

"It is well. . ." And then he staggered to the mantelpiece, and stood there, leaning heavily against it for support. "Emma," he said presently, after a long pause, "I think I will go to bed. Did she say she was worn out? Ah, poor girl! poor girl! But I won't forgive her. When I say a thing, I mean it. Only why did she come—why did she come?" And two great, difficult tears rolled from his dim eyes and made a moist track down either furrowed cheek. The strength of the strong man had departed, and he was as a headstrong child, who will not be persuaded to own himself in the wrong, and yet retains an uneasy sense of his shortcomings.

CHAPTER XL.

GOADED TO MADNESS.

THE lingering light had faded from the sky. The fair green earth was enveloped in a black shroud which effectually hid its vernal tints, and prevented the silvery moon from shining.

Stunned, dazed, crushed by the weight of an insupportable grief, and a loving heart repulsed on every side, Hetty groped her way down the drive.

It was all over.

Her attempt at reconciliation with her parents had failed signally, and there no longer remained any room for hope. A feeling of utter recklessness took possession of her spirit. Her

brain stood still and was incapable of looking forward to the future. In fact, she had no future. Everything was at an end, and nothing mattered. The brightness had gone from her life, and henceforth she did not care what happened. The limits of human suffering had been reached, and fate could not harm her more than it had harmed her already. She was weary, oh, so weary, and unable to contend against the hard buffets of adversity. It was only possible for mortals to endure up to a certain point. After that one's power of resisting misfortune vanished, and complete mental collapse ensued.

Her heart beat fiercely, whilst a single thought dominated her overwrought mind. In vain she sought to repel, to combat it. It increased in intensity, and seized hold of her imagination with a kind of weird fascination. The world was cold and cruel. To bring a helpless infant into such an arena of misery, to give it no choice in the matter, amounted to positive wickedness. Why allow an irresponsible child to pass from an unconscious to a conscious state which entailed so much pain and suffering?

Supposing she bore a boy to Karl Von Kessler? Who would care for the poor darling? Certainly, not its father; still less its grandparents. And she herself was destitute, or very nearly so. Her slender stock of ready money once expended, she should not know where in the whole wide world to lay her head.

No doubt it was a horrible thing to do—this thing that she contemplated. When the crucial moment arrived her courage might very probably fail; but yet she saw no other way out of her troubles. To return to Manchester, take the long, long journey back to Homburg, and trump up some lame excuse to Karl to account for her absence, was out of the question. Between him and her an impassable barrier reared itself—a gulf too deep to be bridged over. For although her flight had been sudden, it was dictated by no mere whim. True, the first fierceness of her wrath was passing away, and as she began to perceive the fundamental differences in their natures a sentiment almost approaching to pity took its place; nevertheless she quite realized that no explanations, no repentance or promises of future amendment, could restore to its pedestal the idol so cruelly shattered. The god of love had fallen from his divine heights and lay smirched and disfigured in the mire. Either through her fault or Karl's, their marriage had proved a failure. Perhaps she expected

too much of him; anyhow such was the sad result. She saw it now quite clearly, and with her eyes thus opened, her anger faded. Very likely Karl was no happier than herself, and if she were only removed from his path he would then be free to follow the bent of his inclinations. She loved him, but he did not love her, and it was just possible he might care for her more in death than in life. Better for one to make a sacrifice, in order to benefit the other, than that both should live on miserable through endless weary years.

And after all, it did not signify if she cut the Gordian knot with her own hands. She was dear to nobody. Her husband would never miss her, her mother had always treated her like an enemy, and her father had driven her from his doors. There would be no one to grieve, no one to shed bitter tears or cherish her memory. She was not wanted. That was the bare, unpalatable truth, which nothing could soften.

And why should she go on living when her heart ached so sorely, and she suffered constant pain?

An overpowering longing for rest seized her. She was tired—very tired, and the mere state of inanition presented infinite attraction to her strained and clouded mind. To cease thinking appeared in her present mood the one goal worth struggling for. The burden of existence was too great to be borne. She sank under it, crushed and disheartened.

Mechanically she walked along, whilst the tall elms swayed gently to and fro in the cool night air, their heavy branches creaking every now and again. The rooks had gone to roost, the lambs had left off bleating, and a great stillness reigned over the sleeping earth—a stillness strangely at variance with the wild, miserable thoughts which distracted Hetty's brain. But she was glad of the darkness. It seemed to shield and protect her from prying eyes, though it could not defend her from herself, or quiet the fever of unrest that tormented her whole being.

Presently a light pierced the surrounding gloom, and instinctively she found her way towards it, and going up to the lodge door, which was now closed, tapped timidly. A pleasant-looking, rosy-faced woman answered the summons, who, upon seeing Hetty, started back as if she had encountered an apparition.

"La! Miss Hetty!" she exclaimed, "you don't mean to say it's you? I knew the box as soon as ever the flyman brought it inside.

But what brings you here at this time of night? How is it you ain't up at the Hall?"

Mrs. Harman, the gardener's wife, was an old friend; and Hetty felt too bruised and broken in spirit to attempt any concealment. A woman has to go through a great deal of suffering before her pride forsakes her so completely.

"I have seen my father and mother, and they refuse to give me shelter," she replied, in a hard, dull voice that sounded unnatural even in her own ears. "They said you had a spare bed and told me to come to you."

"Was there ever such cruelty!" ejaculated Mrs. Harman indignantly, glancing at Hetty's drooping form. "And you in the condition you are in! Well, I never! Some people seem to have no heart."

"They are much to be envied," said Hetty. "At least they do not feel."

"Envied! Not they. It makes my blood boil to think of folk being so unkind to their own kith and kin. What if you *did* marry against their wish? There's a-many young ladies as does the same, and is forgiven proper and right by their parents. But there! although my John is in Mr. and Mrs. Davidson's employ, and I'm not the woman to find fault, I always did say and always will say that they're a hard old couple. Now don't be angry, Miss Hetty, for it's the truth, and you know it."

"We can't alter people's natures, Mrs. Harman," said Hetty faintly, cutting short the worthy soul's speech. "Will you show me to my room—the room," she added, with uncontrollable bitterness, "that I have leave to occupy for one night? I have come a long way, and am desperately tired."

Upon this Mrs. Harman closed the door, and in an incredibly short space of time had lit the fire in the spare bedroom, aired the sheets, and put all in order. Then she vanished, only to return shortly with a cup of tea, a boiled egg, and a liberal plateful of bread-and-butter.

"There, my dearie," she said, "sit you down and take a bite of something to eat and drink. You look as if you wanted food sadly, and are but a shadow of your former self."

Hetty shook her head. She could not eat, and only longed to be left alone. She was quite sensible of Mrs. Harman's kindness, but she felt too stony, too numb and passive, to display much

gratitude. Whether she starved or whether she feasted seemed such a perfect matter of indifference that she could not understand the good woman's solicitude as to her physical welfare. If there had been anybody to care about her, then it would have been different altogether, but as it was—ah! as it was—

"I think I will go to bed and lie down," she said, with a sickly smile. "A good rest is what I want more than anything."

"Very well, dearie," answered Mrs. Harman, looking with genuine concern at Hetty's pale, delicate face. "Perhaps you are right. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll leave the bread-and-butter here, and then if you wake up in the night, hungry, you can help yourself."

"Thank you! I am much obliged."

"And I won't call you to-morrow morning, Miss Hetty, until you ring. You're dead tired, as any one can see, and there's no hurry about getting up."

"No," repeated Hetty automatically. "There's no hurry—none whatever."

"Good-night, then," said Mrs. Harman good-naturedly. "Go to bed at once and sleep soundly." So saying, she left the room, happy in the conviction that she had done her utmost to render her master's daughter comfortable.

Directly she had gone, Hetty turned the key in the lock, to guard herself against interruption, and heaved a sigh of relief. This act afforded a sense of security, and as she took a look round a flickering smile just curved the corners of her lips. The step she had in contemplation needed no witness. Her head felt disagreeably hot and heavy. She took off her hat and laid it on the table. Curious lights flared up before her eyes, darting here and there in torturing confusion. Her brain reeled, and the limbs beneath her tottered, but a blind despair urged her on and prevented any wavering in her purpose.

With strange calm she undressed, put on a dressing-gown, brushed out her beautiful auburn hair, and plaited it neatly into two long tails. This done, she took a letter from the pocket of her discarded gown, tore off half a sheet which had not been used, and in a hand that she sought to make as legible as possible wrote in pencil:—

"To my Father.

"You have punished me, and I accept my punishment. I will disgrace you no longer. The Hetty whom you have forgotten, and cannot forgive, has not any desire to live. Good-bye, father. You have treated me sternly, but I beseech you not to refuse the last favour I shall ever make. Sir Archibald MacIntyre, who lives at Homburg, lent me fifteen pounds before I came away. He has been a good and kind friend to me in my need. Please see that this debt is paid. It weighs on my mind."

When completed, she pinned the note to the front of her dressing-gown, so as to ensure its being seen. Then she glanced at the bed. It was an old-fashioned wooden one, with a high foot-board, finished off on either side by two round mahogany knobs. About her neck she wore a long, black lace scarf, which fell almost to her feet. She took it off, and, with the same unnatural calm, tested it. Next she securely fastened one end of the scarf to the bedpost, and tied the other in a running loop. In one corner of the room stood a little three-legged milking stool. She dragged it up to the bed, placed it about three feet away from the foot-board, and sat down. Then, with strange deliberation, she put the loop round her neck. The scarf immediately became almost taut, and she smiled a weird, unearthly smile. Her preparations were now complete, and there was no occasion to hurry. She could afford to wait a few moments before kicking the stool from beneath her. She crossed her hands, battling against a certain feeling of irresolution that was beginning to take possession of her, whilst, with a lightning-like flash of lucidity, the whole panorama of her life became revealed. She saw herself first a shy, solitary child, pining for affection always withheld; next a proud and sensitive girl, crushed by uncongenial surroundings, and striving to hide the pain at her heart by a demeanour of coldness and reserve. Finally came the short season of triumph during which she had taken the Homburg world by storm, and been recognized as its acknowledged beauty, when Royalty had flattered, and Karl had smiled on her, ending with the brief months of her married life, months chequered by many a cloud, until the storm burst which had destroyed all her hopes, killed all her illusions.

Oh! why hesitate? What was the use of living without Karl's

love? She had no right to let his child suffer from want and destitution. She clenched her teeth, closed her eyes, and tilted up the stool. She meant to die, but in this fateful moment why did she delay? Suddenly she lost her balance, and the stool slipped from under her.

Oh, God! what was this horrible fight for breath? She had not thought that death would be half so difficult, half so lingering and painful. She tried to call out, but in vain. Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth and seemed to swell to a gigantic size. An agonizing spasm of physical fear made her heart stand still. She was too young to die—too young to leave the beautiful bright world, with its green fields, waving trees, and genial sunshine. Should she never see the yellow moon, nor the glittering stars, nor the soft evening sky, any more? A loud knocking deafened her ears. She gasped—she gurgled. Ah, how horrible was death. It was like slipping down into a bottomless abyss. Why had she dared to seek it? Oh for a breath of air—just one! Merciful heavens! how soon would this hideous fight cease? In her anguish she sent up an involuntary prayer that the boon of unconsciousness might be quickly accorded. A hundred thousand mill-wheels were clacking and turning—turning and clacking in her head—it could not last much longer—Surely the end was near

And then all at once she fell quite flat upon the floor, and the fresh air came bubbling back into her lungs. Wonderful escape! The scarf which held her had parted in two, no longer able to bear the strain to which it was subjected. For a while she lay motionless, a huddled heap on the common Kidderminster carpet; but presently her mind grew clearer, and a mighty horror descended upon her spirit. The cowardice and the wickedness of the act she had so nearly committed became more and more apparent. Who was she to struggle against the decrees of the Almighty? A poor, weak, impatient creature who, having done wrong, refused to suffer for her fault. Tears gushed to her eyes. In an agony of self-abasement she flung herself down by the bedside, whilst great deep sobs shook her from top to toe.

"Oh, my God! my God," she cried. "I was mad, out of my senses. Teach me, if Thou canst, to say, 'Thy will, not mine, be done.' I cannot pray properly. I am not worthy to address Thee."

But as she knelt there contrite, humbled, shaken to the very

depths of her being, a fresh trouble assailed her—a pain so sharp, so keen, that it made her face blanch and her whole body quiver.

All through the afternoon she had been feeling ill at ease, but this was something unendurable. Great beads of perspiration stood on her brow. The pain might have lasted one minute, ten, for aught she knew. So intense was the suffering that time stood still. After a while, however, it moderated, and tottering to her feet, she gathered strength sufficient to lie down full length on the bed. Almost immediately another spasm, even sharper than the first, came on. There, in the hour of a woman's greatest need and deadliest peril, she lay battling with the cruel throes of child-birth

Was it night, was it morning, when they ceased? She scarcely knew. Only the cessation from pain was so divine that the gates of Paradise seemed opened.

And then a death-like faintness came over her—a kind of blissful lethargy which blotted out past and future.

The little homely room, with its one composite candle, faded from vision. The fire lost its brightness and grew quite dim—quite dim. The affairs of this earth became shorn of their importance, and appeared infinitely small. Her fevered brain rested after the crisis through which it had passed.

She saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing

God had shown His mercy, and taken back to the fold the little white lamb in whose tender flesh the wolf of the world had made his sharp teeth meet.

Nevermore would the poor heart ache, the loving soul sink under coldness and neglect.

Hetty Davidson was at rest. The Creator had saved her from crime, and displayed His far-seeing wisdom by calling her to Himself.

CHAPTER XLI.

CONCLUSION.

MR. DAVIDSON could not sleep. He tossed and tumbled in bed, now turning on one side, now on the other. He took a liberal dose of bromide of potassium in order to soothe his nerves, but obtained no relief; and altogether he was thoroughly wakeful and wretched. Do what he would, he could not dismiss the thought

of Hetty from his mind. Her pale face rose up before his eyes, white, sorrowful, and reproachful. It haunted him like a ghost. The truest sentiment in his hard old heart was paternal affection, and although during the months that had elapsed since his daughter's marriage he had battled against it fiercely, the endeavour was very far from successful. Hetty's sudden reappearance woke the love which he thought dead. Conscience began to make its voice loudly heard, and inflicted some very ugly pricks.

"You are treating her disgracefully," clamoured the inward monitor which men are so powerless to suppress. "It is positively inhuman to send her away from your door in her present state. If any harm should befall her or the child about to be born, you will be responsible, as she justly said. What happiness have you known lately? You are spiting yourself quite as much as her. Humble that vain thing you misname your pride, and forgive. Remember what the poet said: 'To err is human, to forgive divine.'"

At length he could endure his thoughts no longer. They burnt into his weary brain like tongues of flame. For once in his life he felt the need of sympathy and companionship. The partner of his bosom had never been very congenial, but after all a man's wife is his wife; they have a variety of interests in common, and he will generally appeal to her for support, especially if no one else be at hand. It was so in the present case.

Mr. Davidson turned on his pillow and saw that Mrs. Davidson, like himself, was wide awake.

"Aren't you asleep, Emma?" he inquired, with unusual gentleness.

She sighed wearily.

"No. I don't know what is the matter with me to-night, but I feel as if I could not rest."

"I can't either. Have you any idea what the time is?"

Mrs. Davidson struck a light and looked at her watch.

"Dear me! only just eleven. I thought it was ever so much later."

He made no reply for a few seconds; then he said suddenly, "Emma, do you suppose there would be anybody up at the lodge? Do you think they have all gone to bed?"

"I'm sure I can't say, but it would be easy enough to rouse the

Harmans." And as she spoke she looked at him intently, for apparently the same thought was in her mind as in his.

"It's not much of a room down there, is it?" he went on, averting his head. "Not the sort of room that a lady is accustomed to."

"Oh dear no. I daresay the bed is not aired, or anything. It's so very seldom used."

"Damp sheets are excessively dangerous," he continued. "I would not like a servant to sleep in them, let alone——" breaking off short.

"John," said Mrs. Davidson hesitatingly, "are you—are you thinking of Hetty?"

He flushed up suddenly.

"Yes, Emma," he answered. "I am. I can't help it."

"Neither can I. I believe it is that that has prevented us from sleeping."

"I don't feel altogether easy about her," he said. "She looked and spoke so strangely when I refused my forgiveness."

"You were a little hard upon her, John."

"Perhaps I was," he muttered. "Perhaps I was. Hist! what's that noise?"

"Nothing, only the cat mewing outside. It's a horrid creature. I told cook this very morning that she really must get rid of it, for it prowls about the shrubberies and disturbs me night after night."

"I thought it was a child. It sounded like the cry of a new-born infant, and gave me quite a turn." So saying, he slipped out of bed, and entering the dressing-room adjoining, began huddling on his clothes.

"Why are you getting up?" asked Mrs. Davidson.

"I am going down to the lodge. Possibly I may see Hetty and bring her back."

"Oh! John, are you indeed? Do let me come with you. I shan't be a minute. The poor thing really did look so bad that I have been feeling quite unhappy about her. And I'm not nervous as a rule."

He glanced gratefully at her. He had half expected her to throw cold water on his project and reproach him for being weak and changeable. Never had he been so near loving his wife as at this moment.

So they dressed themselves hurriedly, and going downstairs, roused the butler from his beauty sleep, much to that worthy's astonishment, who was totally unaccustomed to being thus rudely awakened. His master and mistress ordered him to take a lantern and precede them down the drive. That was a strange walk for the old couple. During all the years they had occupied Murchiston Hall they had never taken a similar one. The night was cold and very dark. A gusty wind blew boisterously among the tree-tops, causing them to sway to and fro like shadowy forms from another world. The lantern illuminated a little circle on the path ahead, and, flickering uncertainly, rendered the surrounding gloom still more intense. Here and there the low grey clouds were parted in wild rents, through which the moon shone fitfully. A nameless feeling of awe, of painful expectation, thrilled both husband and wife as they walked, or rather stumbled along. Mrs. Davidson slipped her hand through her companion's arm, partly to guide him, partly to support herself. Every muscle quivered beneath her touch.

"Are you unwell, John?" she said, for of late his health had occasioned a good deal of anxiety.

"I don't know, Emma. I can't think about myself just now. The truth is, I'm thinking of—*her*. I'm not dreaming, am I? She was really here to-day, wasn't she? I get so confused."

"Yes, John, really and truly."

"Ah! I thought so. And I drove her away, didn't I—drove her away with harsh looks and unkind words?"

"You did. I feel sorry for poor Hetty, taking all things into consideration. She seemed so weary and wretched."

"Ay, ay, I remember now. Her husband had forsaken her, and she was all alone. That's bad—very bad for a young woman about to be confined. What can she do with herself?"

"I don't know, unless you forgive her, John."

"Well, we shall see—we shall see," and a smile played about his wrinkled lips.

Mrs. Davidson breathed a sigh of relief. Without exactly knowing why, she had been very much frightened by Hetty's manner, and she was one of those persons who, when frightened, go back upon their former selves.

They did not speak again until they arrived at their destination.

After rapping several times at the lodge door, Mrs. Harman finally appeared in a decidedly light toilette. She wore an old shawl pinned over her night-dress, and on her matronly brow reposed a row of stiff white curl-papers. On perceiving who her visitors were, she uttered an exclamation of combined bashfulness and surprise.

"The Squire and his lady!" she began. "Who would ha' thought it?"

But Mr. Davidson cut her short by inquiring, with unwonted agitation, whether Frau Von Kessler was under her roof.

"Yes," said Mrs. Harman triumphantly, "and asleep in the spare room, bless her dear heart."

"Thank God!" he ejaculated. "Let me in. I want to speak to my daughter."

"She seemed very tired," observed Mrs. Harman, hesitating to perform his bidding. "Will you disturb her to-night?"

"Yes, yes, to-night. She will sleep all the lighter when she hears what I have got to say."

Whereupon he moved forward and attempted to open the door of the room where Hetty lay.

"She has locked it," he said impatiently, for all at once he felt a feverish longing to clasp her in his arms and tell her that, despite his rough words and angry denunciations, he had always loved her in his heart. He was too excited to brook delay. Within the last few hours his mind had been the centre of a complete moral revolution.

"Hetty," he called out in a voice that rang clearly and strongly, "Hetty, my girl, wake up and come back to your old father's home. Don't be afraid. He was rude and stern to you a little while ago. Now all is forgotten."

He waited for an answer, but none came.

"Hetty," he cried again, even more loudly than before, "why don't you wake? You must hear me, surely. Oh! Hetty, it is I who ask for forgiveness now. Be more merciful to me than I was to you."

But, plead as he might, he elicited no response. At last he became thoroughly alarmed.

"She may have been taken ill," he said huskily. "We must force an entrance."

Oh, no," interposed Mrs. Davidson. "Leave the poor child to

sleep to-night. Depend upon it, she is tired out, and we can come again quite early to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning?" he exclaimed irritably. "How do we know that it may not be too late?"

"Too late for what?" she asked, bewildered by his fierce excitement.

"Tut, woman! you a mother, and with so little understanding! I tell you I *must* and will see Hetty to-night!"

It was useless to oppose him. By sheer strength they eventually succeeded in forcing open the door.

He rushed into the room, followed by Mrs. Davidson, and what a sight met their eyes!

On a table close by the bed stood a composite candle, sputtering and hissing, burnt almost to the socket, whilst on the bed itself lay Hetty, fair and pale, and resembling an exquisite white wax-work. Her auburn head was thrown back like a stag at bay. The great soft eyes were closed, their fringes showing up the marble purity of the cheeks on which they rested, and round the corners of her delicate mouth there lingered a smile of unearthly radiance. Beautiful she looked as any statue, but equally still and rigid.

As they gazed on her the hearts of father and mother ceased beating. The hot blood coursing but a minute ago so wildly through Mr. Davidson's veins turned to ice. Quivering from head to toe, he advanced, and took one little hand in his.

It was cold—quite cold. In vain he pressed it convulsively. No answering pressure greeted him. With an inarticulate cry of horror he let it fall, whilst a ghastly pallor stole over his countenance.

"John," whispered Mrs. Davidson in an awe-struck tone, "what's the matter? Has Hetty fainted?"

He turned and faced her, and for a moment both miserable parents looked deep into each other's eyes.

"No," he said hoarsely. "She—is—dead. . . ." And he buried his face in his hands.

An agonizing pause followed. Suddenly he started. A wailing cry rang through the room, plaintive and piteous as that of a young animal.

"It is Hetty's child," he said, in a low, hushed voice. "That cry has been ringing in my ears all the evening."

Then his fortitude forsook him, and with smothered sobs, which shook his whole frame, he knelt by the bedside.

"John, John," whimpered his wife, down whose cheeks two slow tears were rolling, "don't take on so—don't—don't!"

But he only moaned and called out: "God forgive me—a miserable sinner. . . ."

They were terribly sorry for their handiwork, but alas! like many things in this world, their repentance came too late. It could not restore to life the daughter whom they had injured, and whose heart they had been instrumental in breaking.

The living babe wailed by the side of its dead mother—the mother who would never tend or caress it. Its sad little life formed part of the great human tragedy everywhere going on around.

As for Hetty, it was well. Her sufferings were at an end. Not so with her father and mother. Remorse was their future portion. Henceforth they were doomed to pine beneath that gnawing, festering sore which ever tortures those who carry their resentment too far, and who have no sympathy with their fellow-creatures.

Let the old people be. The few years left to them are not likely to contain much happiness.

You and I will not judge them. No one knows what the sentence may be which awaits them "Behind the Veil," whilst on this earth a martyrdom of unavailing regret will bring its own sure punishment.

THE END.

A Mother's Confidence.

IN a sweet old-fashioned villa, overgrown with ivy, and with roses climbing over the porch, a lady reclined on a low couch. The open French window admitted a fragrant perfume from the terrace which the drawing-room overlooked and from a miniature wilderness beyond, where was dense undergrowth and beautiful fir trees, sycamores and willows.

"I am afraid I cannot indulge my darling boy this time ; it is five years since I have been out." Mrs. McRowan uttered these words as she caressed her son's hand with a tenderness which plainly told how it grieved her to refuse any request of his.

"I am very strong, mother ; quite able to support you if you will but lean on me. I long to take you out this evening, so that my last remembrance of you may be a pleasant one. Say yes, dear mother, and trust me for bringing you back as well as you are now."

"Let it be as you wish, Stuart dear. I can trust your love if not the strength of your arms."

The young man's arms proved to be strong enough to lift his mother from her couch and lead her slowly round the terrace. A few moments they stood looking longingly into the wilderness, but Stuart did not feel justified in taking his mother down the narrow path, almost hidden by overhanging shrubs. A half-smothered sigh escaped Mrs. McRowan as they turned to retrace their steps.

"Why that sigh, darling mother ? Are you getting tired ?" Stuart's arm tightened, and drew the dear form closer to him as he spoke.

"No, love, I am not tired ; I was thinking how very lonely you and I shall feel after to-night."

"I shall remember this walk, and try to picture you running to the gate to meet me when I return."

"If such a thing were possible I too might think of it, but if it will please *you* to think of it *I* must not think it unlikely."

"I shall look forward to nothing short of that ; but, mother, will not my father try to cheer you while I am away? He told me he would stay at home in the evenings."

"I hope he may stay, I am sure, and I shall talk to him about you and your prospects. There, my love, let me rest a moment, and while we look at this beautiful sunset—it may be the last time together—promise me *one thing*—I know I ought not to ask it, for you have been always faithful in little things as in greater ; but there will be temptations in your path which in your life at home you could not even imagine—promise never to do a single thing of which you would feel ashamed to tell me, or for any one else to tell me."

"Dear mother, I promise solemnly to do nothing to grieve you or my father. I hope the example you have always set me will, with your teaching and the help of One whom you have taught me to trust in, keep me from even the appearance of evil."

"Thank you, my dear boy ; I am quite happy now. Through good report or ill I shall always trust you to do right."

"Yes, indeed I will, and then no evil report *can* reach you. Shall we now go in, sweet mother ?"

"Yes, love, or your father will arrive while we are out, and I rather fear he will think I ought not to have come."

Five minutes later Mrs. McRowan was again on her couch, none the worse for her "ramble," as she called it ; but knowing her husband's dislike to any attempted exertion on her part, wisely kept the knowledge of it to herself, lest the harmony of her son's last evening at home should be spoiled. She would have been glad to have kept her boy always by her side, and there was enough business in the "home office," as it was called, but a branch having been established in a town at some distance it was Mr. McRowan's wish that his son should, although still in his teens, take the management of it, as the man who had charge of it wished for an advance of salary, to which the wily Scot would not accede.

Stuart, who feared his father as much as he loved his mother, was willing to do anything to please his stern parent, and although broken-hearted at the thought of leaving his mother and her consequent lonely life, put everything the pleasantest way he could think of. Not that he always felt as cheerful as he tried to speak, for he knew that nothing short of a miracle could make

his mother anything but an invalid, a fall from her horse having injured her spine.

Mr. McRowan was a careless man, whose mind was wholly given to making money. He left it to his son to anticipate the wants of his wife, and it may be safely said that she was less beloved as a wife than as a mother, for whatever her husband lacked in affectionate care Stuart gave, showing by his solicitude that she was all in all to him. He it was who assisted her downstairs at noon, and back to her room in the evening.

In Mrs. McRowan's room the sad farewell was *not* said, for no word was spoken ; but heart spoke to heart through those windows of the soul, which never err. The trial was too great for the poor lady, and for many days she was too ill to leave her room. Stuart was never told of this, and his letters were always hopeful, so in time his mother took heart again ; looking forward to the time when she should once more lean on the arm of her dearly-loved son and only child.

Winter is approaching and Mrs. McRowan knows exactly how many days must elapse before her boy will arrive to spend Christmas at home ; nay, more, she has counted the hours, and as each day draws to a close ticks off so many hours and thinks delightfully how much shorter the time is growing. At last only five days remain to be got through, but now the hours grow longer, as it seems, for the poor lady is too ill to read or do anything to make the time pass quickly, and every time she hears footsteps a great hope fills her heart and makes her breath come in short gasps ; but no, it is never her dear boy's step that she hears, and she scolds herself for thinking it possible for him to come so long before the time appointed.

At noon on this eventful day, Mr. McRowan came home breathless, and looking more angry than his wife had seen him for years. Tremblingly she asked him if anything had gone wrong at the office.

"Yes," he replied, "but not in my office ; it is Stuart who has made a fool of himself in some way."

"Never, never," Mrs. McRowan replied quickly ; "I could stake my life on it. Whatever may have put you out Stuart has had no hand in it ; *he* has done no wrong."

"I wish I could think so ; all I know is that I have got a telegram requesting me to go to him at once."

"He must be ill, oh my poor boy; was there no message for me? I must go to him; take me to him, John."

"I shall do no such thing. He is not ill, so you need not get that into your silly head; you always fancy something dreadful. I didn't mean to tell you, but of course if you don't know *everything* there will be no doing anything with you while I am away. The truth is, I am sent for by the bank, if you must know, so that looks like mischief."

"But what has the bank to do with Stuart?"

"There has been a lot of trouble with the accounts. Stuart found things somewhat irregular, and has, while pretending to set things straight, filled up one of my blank cheques—which I gave him to fill in when he required money for business purposes—for a large amount, and sent a boy to get it cashed for him."

"Do you believe this, John? Cannot you see it is some one else who has filled in the cheque? Do you think Stuart would trust a boy with a large sum of money?"

"The boy *says* he sent him. How could any one else obtain possession of the cheque to be able to fill it in?"

"I cannot answer your question; I know *Stuart* never did it if any dishonour is attached to it."

"Well, well, my dear, I don't suppose *you* think him guilty; if his own mother does not trust him, no one else might be expected to do so."

"Tell him I am sure he has done no wrong; promise me, John, that you will tell him so, and let him come home."

"I promise you to let him come; but mind, if what I suspect proves true, he shall not stay another day here."

"It will *not* prove true. Stuart is all right. I wonder how you can think, or easily believe, evil of him."

"I can't stop to argue with you or I shall miss my train. Make your mind easy, however; I'll think over what you have said, and we'll come home to-night if possible."

At midnight Stuart and his father arrived. The servants were dismissed when the supper tray was brought in. Mr. McRowan then told his wife that a cheque for three thousand pounds had been presented at the bank, and the large amount had caused surprise, particularly on account of the cheque having been presented by a youth, who would hardly be considered capable of

handling so much money. The cheque was payable to, and backed by, Stuart McRowan.

"And you know nothing about it, my boy," Mrs. McRowan said, tenderly laying her hand on her son's arm.

"Nothing whatever, mother. I have told them all so; but father thinks I have been careless in some way."

"You must have been," Mr. McRowan said, "or how could any one have got one of the cheques I signed for you to fill up when you required them?"

"I always kept my desk locked; I am sure I never left it open for a moment—that is, I am as sure as I can be."

"You had better not be too sure. How do you account for your name on the back of the cheque?"

"That is a forgery, father; I feel sure if you submitted it to an expert it would be proved to be such."

"I will do no such thing; I have been disgraced quite enough already. You must abide by what I have said."

"Yes, father, and I will prove my innocence to you sooner or later. I am content to wait, knowing that my mother believes me honest and truthful."

Mr. McRowan left the room hastily; his wife asked anxiously what had been said that her son must abide by.

"Father said I must go into the world and shift for myself. I believe he is afraid to have the handwriting tested lest it should be known and hinder me from getting employment of any kind."

"Are you then to be turned out?" said, or rather gasped, Mrs. McRowan. "My boy, I will never live to see it; you shall not be sent out into the cold hard world while I live."

"But, dear mother, it will be the only way of showing my father that I have not done this wicked thing."

"I don't know how your father can think you did it, or know anything about it."

"I am afraid he does. It is very hard to bear; but I will be patient."

The following morning another farewell was said, this time with apparent cheerfulness but heavy hearts. Then Stuart went into the world to fight his way, taking only a few pounds to provide necessities for himself until he could earn more. His mother wished him to take more, but finding he did not wish to do

so extracted a promise that he would write to her for some when he required it.

Mr. McRowan was not happy, although he had, as he termed it, done his duty to his son by banishing him until he repented of his misdeeds. Moreover the happy confidence of his wife in the integrity of their son set him thinking, and being a shrewd man of business he began, as the saying is, to put two and two together. Fearful of being again deceived—this showed that he had begun to think Stuart innocent—he went secretly and in disguise to the scene of action, there to prosecute inquiries into the matter.

Stuart wrote to his mother, telling of employment which he had obtained, without saying what it was, or what remuneration he was to receive. The thought never suggested itself that he had taken anything less congenial to his taste than keeping books by double entry; but so it was. The young man reared in luxury was so wounded by his father's want of confidence in him that he had taken the only thing that was offered before his money was all used. He was night timekeeper in a manufactory, and was thankful for that.

One evening, when within a stone's-throw of the gate, Stuart was knocked down by a rough, burly fellow who turned a corner sharply and half-tumbled over the young man he had thrown down. "Hallo, mate," he gasped, "are you much worse?"

"No, thank you," was the reply. "But, Ben, don't you know me?"

"Know you? Why, if you weren't dressed poor like, and looking so thin and bad, I should say you *was* Master Stuart."

"I am Stuart, but I can't stop now. Where may I see you to-morrow? I should like to have a little talk with you."

"I'll meet you anywhere, and when you like, sir. I'm sorry to see you looking so bad like. Are you ill?"

"Yes, Ben; ill in mind. Meet me here to-morrow at noon, if it won't put you out of the way. Where do you work now?"

"Nowhere just now, sir. I'll be here sure enough." He kept his word, and answered all Stuart's questions in a straightforward way. After that the young man procured work for him at the factory, and then went to his lodgings to write to his mother.

Mrs. McRowan was overjoyed when she read her son's letter. She sent a servant to fetch Mr. McRowan, and when he arrived

startled him by saying, "God has judged between us," at the same time handing him the letter, which he read through carefully.

"I will go to him at once, poor boy," he said. "I must see Ben, and find out all that he knows or thinks, and if we can prove that what he hints at is true I'll have the rascal punished, if there is law in the country."

Ben repeated to Mr. McRowan in the presence of Stuart that the man who had charge of the branch business had duplicate keys for every lock on the premises, and as only one had been given up, they were free to suppose the man had access both to the office and the desks in it.

When the youth who had presented the cheque at the bank was described to Ben, that astute person began to see his way through the whole transaction.

"Why, that was Masden's son, I'll take my davy. The lad wouldn't dare to do or say anything but what his father told him ; it would have been more than his life was worth."

"You must hold yourself in readiness to come when I telegraph for you, Ben. You must see Stuart set right, and you shall never want a day's work while we have one to give."

"I should like to see the young master in his own again, sir, for his own sake ; he was always a civil-spoken young gentleman, and well worth working for. I'll do what I can for his sake."

Stuart did not return home with his father, but as soon as any one could be found to take his place he went alone, and rejoiced his mother's heart by telling her how glad he was to have been knocked down that day by Ben Brook.

A little time proved Ben's suspicions to be correct. Masden's son was identified by the manager of the bank as the youth who had been detained till Mr. McRowan arrived. The boy confessed his share in the transaction ; but begged to be protected from his father, who would ill-treat him.

Masden was proved to be in the possession of duplicate and skeleton keys, and experts pronounced a similarity in his handwriting and the forged name on the back of the cheque. Finding the evidence overwhelming, the man pleaded guilty, and his son was protected by his absence for seven years, during which time the lad prospered under Stuart's care and Ben's advice.

Mr. McRowan asked his son's pardon for all his unkind treat-

ment. Stuart clasped the outstretched hand, and a feeling very different from the one he used to have has sprung up in his heart, from the time that his father believed him to be thoroughly honourable.

Mrs. McRowan is the happiest of women, though still unable to leave her couch without the support of her son, in whom she still has perfect confidence.

LILY LEE.

Sonnet.

FROM VICTOR HUGO.

SINCE I have put my lips so fever dry
To your full cup ; since I have laid my head
Upon your hands ; since I have caught your sigh,
Like evening breeze when autumn leaves are shed.

Since it is given me to hear you speak
The words that life's best mysteries reveal ;
Since to my smiles your own in sunshine break,
And to my tears your tears responsive steal :

Since I have seen your morning star arise,
And watched the weaving of your coronal ;
Since on my troubled stream 'neath sombre skies,
You let a rose leaf from your chaplet fall :

I can say calmly to the rapid hours,
" Pass on, pass on, I cannot now grow old ;
Pass on, pass on, with all your fading flowers,
There is no fading for the flower I hold.

" Although you shake the goblet with your wings,
You cannot spill one drop when all is done ;
My soul more fire than you bring ashes—brings,
My heart more love, than you, oblivion !"

C. E. MEETKERKE.

A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS," "THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO SIDES OF A WALL.

"Le monde n'est jamais divisé pour moi qu'en deux régions : celle où elle est, et celle où elle n'est pas !" ****

"A little later, in a nook,
I saw the pair secluded ;
Her face was flushed, and he looked—well !
As likely once you, too, did."

E. J. S.

"Be not deceived !
The love wherewith I love you is not such
As you would offer me."

LONGFELLOW.

AMONG the invitations Douglas Conrath accepted between Christmas and Lent was one from Mrs. Osgood Graves, who was given to entertaining enjoyable little house-parties at all sorts of odd times and seasons in her luxurious and picturesque home in Buckinghamshire.

There was a Mr. Osgood Graves, a silent, stern-looking man, many years older than his beautiful wife, with whom he was passionately in love. For her part, she had married him against her will, and never suffered him to forget that she had done so. She spent his money right royally (fortunately he had a pretty fair supply), and formed a most effective background for his family diamonds. She had not, however, given him an heir to Haricott Hall, which was an unspoken though bitter disappointment to both.

Haricott Hall was not a bad place wherein to lounge away a week now and then. It was cool in summer and warm in winter ; the cook was unexceptionable, and the guests were usually well assorted ; besides, it was within such easy distance of town.

The Dinwoodies, mother and daughter, often spent a few days at Haricott Hall. Lady Dinwoodie's mother and Mrs. Osgood Graves' mother had, I believe, been distant relatives, and Lady Dinwoodie, as we know, never failed to avail herself of the advantages with which fortune had blessed her friends and connections. She and Fay were there now, as were also Lady Northburgh and Sir Cyril, Bee Adeane (*without* her grandparents), and a fair sprinkling of other guests, more or less interesting. Douglas went down in company with Max Fenwicke, who, by the way, had been a college chum of Mr. Osgood Graves at Cambridge.

A few days had passed very pleasantly, but to-night the whole party from Haricott Hall were dining at a house several miles away, and, for some unexplained reason, the evening had proved rather a failure. It was now nearly at an end, and the guests were assembled in the drawing-room, praying silently that the end might come quickly. The hostess—fat, fair, and thirty—was engrossed with her favourite cavalier, and had eyes for no one else. The host was arguing himself black in the face on the subject of Gladstone and Home Rule. The young men were moody, the young women pensive. A pretty girl had just sat down to the piano, thus relieving a very elderly vestal who had been favouring the company with "pieces" as old and as thrilling as the "Battle of Prague" and its contemporaries.

Bee shared in the general depression to-night. She could hardly have told why. Somehow things in general had seemed unsatisfactory of late. As a matter of fact, she was beginning to be a little tired of fashionable life, and was looking forward to the coming London season with anything but pleasure. She used to wonder sometimes if it could be that existence held nothing more satisfying than the continual rush and "going on" from one crowd to another, where there was never more than time to exchange a few hurried words with friends and acquaintances alike, and then skim off to the next entertainment on the evening's or afternoon's list. Was there no home-life now—anywhere? And her perverse heart would turn longingly back to the early days of her childhood, and to shabby obscure Garth Street.

The pretty girl at the piano was singing in a sweet plaintive voice, "Oh that we two were maying." Just behind Bee, who,

for a wonder, was sitting alone, two weary-looking young men, who had driven all the way from Windsor to attend this brilliant entertainment, were discussing people and things in what they fondly imagined to be an undertone.

"Awfully silly song!" murmured the most exhausted-looking of the two, who appeared to have been vanquished in single combat with the letter "g" as a final. "*Mayin'*! What's mayin'? Why mayin'? Why not *marchin'*? I wish I was marchin', I know—anywhere out of this."

"I believe you," acquiesced the other with emphasis. "Were you ever at a much livelier entertainment?"

"Yes," grinned his companion. "I've been in a dentist's waitin'-room."

Both laughed feebly at this sparkling ebullition of wit. Then the second speaker went on with a faint appearance of interest:

"Who's the fetching-looking little woman in black talking to Northburgh?"

"Oh, that?" said his friend, struggling wildly with his eyeglass. "She's a Miss Leyden. Our fellows used to call her the Leyden jar, she's so awfully thrillin', don't you know. Northburgh looks rather *épris*, doesn't he?" he added critically.

"Possibly," was the languid answer. "Shows his good taste if he is. I feel as if I were going to be rather *épris* myself."

Bee looked quickly across the room at the "fetching-looking little woman in black."

Cyril certainly was looking rather devoted, and, noting this, a quick, unaccountable pang ran through her consciousness. She was certainly not in love with Sir Cyril; but hitherto his attentions had been hers so absolutely that she had come to look upon them as a right. Their voluntary withdrawal was inconceivable.

Miss Leyden, though not in the least pretty, appeared to possess an irresistible—and to her sister-women unaccountable—attraction for the sterner sex. They flocked about her wherever she went; they vied with each other in anticipating her wishes; they laughed at her sallies—for she was a clever, sparkling little thing; they looked grave over her troubles, which she had a pretty appealing way of confiding to them. She had had more offers of marriage than she could count, and it was popularly supposed that she could wind any given man round her little

finger—to use a worn-out simile. Military men were her speciality. There were rumours, indeed, that she had refused half the British army, and been engaged, temporarily and consecutively, to the other half. But this was probably a slight exaggeration. At present she was unattached, and on the look-out for further prey—military or civilian, as occasion offered.

As Bee watched the upward glances of Miss Leyden's eyes and the downward glances of Sir Cyril's, she felt both hurt and angry. She was being neglected, not only by Cyril, but by all the other men in the room. This to her was a new order of things, and she did not like it at all. Presently, with a curious lump in her throat, she rose, and wandered into the conservatory, which for a wonder was empty. Here she was joined by Douglas, who got sharply snubbed for his pains. His look of hurt amazement recalled her to herself, and she laughed apologetically.

"I am so—so tired," she said, with a pathetic little movement of her head. "You must not mind my being cross, dear old Douglas. *You* will never get tired of me, will you?"

He smiled a little at the childlike transparency of her mood.

"No," he said slowly and tenderly, "nor will any one else, I should say. You foolish child! After all, Bee, I think no one understands you as I do. I wonder if you know how like and yet how unlike you are to the little wilful Bee of Garth Street?" he added after a moment or two.

"And you?" she made answer somewhat wistfully. "Ah, you are not in the very least like the Douglas of Garth Street. You are what grandfather calls a 'swell' now. People boast of having your acquaintance. There are paragraphs about you in the society papers. You are the author of 'Yesterday.' You are flattered, and courted, and run after. And yet, Douglas, my dear, I don't know that it has spoilt you," she added, looking up at him with a frank innocent smile.

How the old loving term of endearment stirred his heart—stirred it with a strange yearning tenderness in which passion had no part!

"Bee," he said unsteadily, after a short pause, during which a somewhat rare plant suffered considerably, "will you tell me something—something which perhaps I have no right to ask? Are you—are you engaged to Sir Cyril Northburgh?"

A deep painful crimson flushed her pure little face.

"No," she answered in a very low voice, after a pause, "I am not engaged to him."

Douglas's heart leapt up, then sank again.

"There is another question I should like to ask," he said somewhat huskily. "Do you——" But he stopped. He was almost certain she cared for Sir Cyril—but was he entitled to ask the question? Hardly. Besides, it was plain—plain to the meanest understanding—that towards himself she had no feeling warmer than a sister's. And, in truth, she would have been shocked and startled had she divined the mad, overwhelming love he had for her, a love—well, not in the least like a brother's.

"Do I what?" she asked shyly, after a minute.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," he answered with an effort.

"Douglas," she said hesitatingly, when another minute or so had passed, "is anything troubling you? Both Fay and I have thought of late that—that you seemed unhappy."

He did not answer immediately. Then he said in a strange voice:

"Unhappy? Why should I be unhappy? I think I may say I am on the high-road to fortune; and I think I may say I am on the high-road to fame. I have many—let us say, friends; and I have fairly good health of mind and body. What more could I desire?"

"You will not be offended if I—say something?" she said slowly.

"No—I think not."

"Well, I have thought—I have wondered," she went on in an uncertain, faltering way, "if perhaps—you cared for some one—and were not quite sure if—if she cared—for you."

A dead silence.

How strong the scent of the azaleas!—almost overpowering.

At last Douglas spoke.

"Yes? And if—it were so?" he said hoarsely.

"Well, dear," laying her little hand on his arm, "I want to tell you—perhaps I ought not—but I can't bear to see you unhappy. Douglas, she *does* care for you—she loves you very dearly."

Another silence.

The subdued hum of voices came to them from the drawing-room. Some one was singing Kjerulf's "Last Night." The

lovely pathetic refrain stole through the heavily-scented flowers and shrubs.

"Bee—do you mean that? Is it true? Do you—do you *understand*?"

His face was white as death. His eyes sought hers in almost passionate entreaty. He had caught her hands, and was holding them close up to his heart.

"Why, yes, dear—of course I understand. And indeed it is quite true. Ah! if I had known you cared so much, I think I should have told you long ago. Poor little Fay! Why, she has loved you, I believe, ever since we were all children together."

"Ever since we were children together!" Ah, God! how the words throbbed and echoed through his heart and brain! Ever since we were children!

He could not speak. A strange sick giddiness took possession of him. He grasped the edge of one of the flower-laden shelves, and half involuntarily closed his eyes.

Presently he was conscious of Bee's hand stealing gently into his.

"Douglas! Oh, my dear, how you must have suffered! How glad I am that you will be happy—at last!"

He turned his eyes full upon her. There was something terrible in the suppressed grief they held—something that Bee could not understand.

"Yes," he muttered, "I have suffered. God knows I have suffered." Then he added abruptly, "Let me go, Bee. I am—ill. This place suffocates me."

With quick, uncertain steps he went out, and Bee remained standing beside a great palm, absently running one of its spiked glossy leaves between her slender fingers.

"Poor Douglas!" she murmured, with a little sigh. "How fond of her he must be!"

Was she glad—or sorry? She hardly knew.

* * * * *

On the next forenoon the sun shone bright and warm, and the whole party, with very few exceptions, were impounded by Max Fenwicke into exploring—(no, *not* ruins, reader! How could you think it of me? "We've all been there before," much too often)—a certain wood some miles from Haricott Hall, where a wishing-well of wonderful properties was supposed to be con-

cealed. No one, in the memory of man, had ever been known to discover this wishing-well. Indeed, it was popularly held to be a delusion and a myth. But then, as the indefatigable Max sensibly observed, "Why should it not be found to-day?"

Therefore, immediately after luncheon, behold a heterogeneous mass of young men and maidens piled into variously-sized vehicles *en route* for the desired haven. Of course they expected the afternoon to "keep up;" and, equally of course, the sun disappeared, and the afternoon "went down." An ominously damp wind was blowing as the party alighted on the outskirts of the wood. Max Fenwicke hailed this wind with approbation, as it was "sure to keep off the rain."

The explorers then set off, principally in twos, to discover the well, and so obtain the wishes nearest their hearts. It chanced that Cyril had charge of Bee, Douglas of Fay, and Max Fenwicke of the all-conquering Miss Leyden, to whose charms he had apparently succumbed. "It" did not rain; but when the wind went down "it" did what was, perhaps, worse. A dense, white, clammy mist came swiftly up and enveloped the surrounding landscape in obscurity and gloom.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Cyril Northburgh as he came to a sudden standstill, and gazed around in some perplexity. "We'd better turn back. We shan't be able to see a yard before us in another minute."

Whereupon they turned back. But whether they had taken the wrong path, or diverged slightly from the right path, or once more retraced their footsteps, I cannot say. At all events, they found themselves confronted by a sufficiently formidable stone wall; and over this wall, though they skirted it carefully for some yards to right and left, no way could be found.

"Oh, Cyril, I am so tired," exclaimed Bee at last. "Do let us rest for a minute before we go any further. I'm sure the mist will lift soon."

Now, Cyril was by no means sure of anything of the kind. Nevertheless, he was not at all averse to remaining in misty seclusion with his present companion. So he spread his overcoat upon a mossy fallen log, made Bee sit down, and seated himself beside her.

She was looking very sweet and winsome to-day; and Sir Cyril was keenly conscious of the fact. His breath came a little quickly.

She had kept him at bay for many months. But—his opportunity had come at last. For such an ordinarily unemotional young man, however, his heart was beating in a way which, as he would have expressed it, was "most deucedly uncomfortable." Love-making was somewhat out of his line; and he had certainly never asked any girl to marry him. A depressing doubt of this girl's feelings towards him chained his tongue for a space, and drove eloquence far from him.

Bee was sitting curled up on the log like a little sealskin ball—for the grass was unpleasantly wet—her pretty chin resting on her muff, her eyes round and absorbed.

"Bee," said Cyril at last, in a voice that certainly did not seem like his own—"Bee, what is it? What are you thinking about?"

"Hush!" she answered, in an excited whisper. "Hush! There is the dearest little frog hopping straight this way. Look!—over there! Isn't it pretty? Don't move, Cyril. Ah—there!—you have frightened it away!" This in an accent of keen reproach.

"Oh, hang—— I mean never mind the frog," said her companion indignantly. "You can see dozens of them any time."

Bee sighed in a resigned way, and buried her chin in her muff again.

"Bee"—went on Cyril, who had regained his usual self-possession—"you know that I have something to say to you—do you not?" As he spoke he deliberately took one of her hands out of her muff, and held it firmly in both his.

"To say to me?" she echoed weakly.

"You know that you have made me love you?" he said, his usually cold eyes softening with a light few had ever seen there.

"You know it?" he repeated, as she did not speak.

"Yes," she murmured, "as a friend."

"No, not as a friend."

"How, then?"

"You know very well how."

A silence followed.

"Do you want me to tell you, Bee?" Cyril whispered, after a minute. His arm was round her, and his head was very close to hers. (For a novice, he was really getting on remarkably well, though his observations were certainly not characterized by either brilliancy or originality.)

"Don't you think we ought to go home now?" Bec said perversely. "The mist seems to be thickening."

"Answer me, dear, one way or another," returned her lover, venturing to draw her a little nearer to him, and trying to look into her averted face.

"Does it matter which way?" she said, with a half-hysterical laugh.

He loosened his hold a little.

"Bee, are you trifling with me?" he asked somewhat sternly.

Miss Adeane was silent. Her heart was beating fast; her colour rose and ebbed alternately. She lifted her eyes swiftly to his, and as swiftly lowered them again. Two tears hung on her thick dark lashes.

In another moment she felt herself drawn close up to Cyril's heart, and held there.

"My dear one—my own love! You will love me? You will be my wife?" he murmured agitatedly.

But she twisted herself into freedom again.

"Oh, Cyril—wait—listen," she said in a breathless kind of way. "I—I'm not at all sure that I—that I like you—enough." The last words were almost inaudible.

Cyril calmly replaced his right arm in its former position. A caressing smile was just visible under the sweep of his moustache.

"Foolish little darling!" he said, tenderly replacing a lock of hair that had strayed rebelliously from under her hat. "Why, Bee, I shall love you so well, I shall be so good to my little wife, that you will not be able to help loving me. Besides, dear, I think you do care for me just a little. You don't dislike me, do you?"

"No," she made answer slowly, "I don't dislike you, of course. But I'm almost sure I'm not in love with you." And she blushed rosily.

"But, my dear child, very few girls are really in love with the men they marry—just at first, you know," said Sir Cyril, with the air of "one who knows."

"Are they not?" was the doubtful answer.

And again the clear grey eyes met his so wistfully that he almost kissed them. Fearful of startling her at this stage of the proceedings, however, he refrained, and only said, pulling his moustache with his disengaged hand:

"In nearly all happy marriages the woman's love comes afterwards, you know." (I suppose Sir Cyril thought he was speaking the truth in making this extraordinary statement, but I really cannot vouch for him.)

"Does it?" said Bee, who was thinking of Fay, and of one night when that usually practical young person had wept and sobbed as she confessed her love for a man who had never paid her the slightest attention, much less shown any symptoms of wishing to marry her.

"At any rate," went on Cyril, who was impatient to set the seal of betrothal on the soft fresh lips so near to him—"at any rate, Bee, you like me better than any other fellow."

"Yes—I think I do," she answered after a minute, "except Douglas, of course."

"Oh, Douglas be——" Here the speaker stopped, and choked off a naughty word. Then, after a brief pause, he continued icily:

"Of course, in that case, I need say nothing further." He had withdrawn his arms, and was absolutely white with anger.

Bee looked at him in reproachful remonstrance.

"Why, Cyril, you know Douglas is my brother—in everything except reality," she said, with a quaint little smile. "He doesn't want to marry me, bless his dear old heart—and I don't want to marry him. But do you know, Cyril," she went on, with adorable shyness—"I really think I must like you a—a good deal, because—last night——" Here she stopped and wastefully picked little tufts of fur out of her muff.

"Yes," he said, in a considerably mollified tone. "Last night—what?"

"Well"—almost inaudibly—"last night—when you were talking to that Miss Leyden—I felt as if—as if I were so lonely—so neglected——" The rest of the sentence was quite inaudible, principally because Sir Cyril at once took possession of her again, and held her so tightly that she could hardly breathe.

"My dear little girl," he whispered with glad tenderness, "do you mean to say you were jealous? Why, Bee, that is the strongest possible proof that you do care for me."

"Is it?" hiding her hot little face on the breast of his coat. "Well, then, very likely I do care for you—a little. But—I don't know."

"Bee," he said abruptly, "should you be grieved if I went away, and if you never saw me again?"

"Why, Cyril"—raising two startled eyes to his—"of course I should. You are not going away, are you?"

"Not unless you send me," he made answer, a tender smile stealing round his mouth. "You foolish little one! What an innocent child you are! Do you know that you are very fond of me, Bee? Not nearly so fond of me as I am of you, of course. But that will come afterwards. Say something kind to me, darling," he added, entreatingly. "I have cared for you, I think, ever since I knew you. And I have waited such a long, weary time. Say you will marry me."

"Well, perhaps—after a long time—I don't know—I'll see," was the somewhat contradictory answer.

It was enough, apparently, for Sir Cyril; for he murmured the approved formula:

"My own darling!"

Then quite suddenly he stooped his head, and pressed his lips on hers in a long passionate kiss.

But, to his surprise, she pushed him violently away from her, and burst into angry tears.

"Oh, *don't!*" she sobbed excitedly. "I don't *want* you to kiss me! I won't *allow* you to kiss me! I won't promise to marry you at all if you are so—so *hateful!*"

Sir Cyril looked petrified, as well he might; and for a few moments there was silence, only broken by Bee's stifled sobs.

At last Cyril said in a slightly sarcastic voice:

"Am I never to be allowed to kiss you at all, then?"

Hardly had the words left his lips than a voice came out of the mist, apparently a few feet away, saying, half reproachfully, half indignantly:

"I think it's awfully cruel of you—I do indeed!"

With a short sharp exclamation, Cyril sprang to his feet.

Bee jumped up too, ceased crying, and grasped her companion's arm.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed in a vehement whisper. "Who's that?"

Presently the voice went on again:

"I assure you I never cared for any woman before, except

once, and that was years ago. But from the moment I saw you here, I felt, you know, that—that it was all over with me."

The voice was Max Fenwicke's, and it held a ring of pathos that in him seemed almost comic. It was Miss Leyden's voice that answered:

"Oh, Mr. Fenwicke, I am so cold, and my feet are so wet. How can I tell if I reciprocate your feelings or not—just now?"

"Where are they?" whispered Bee, still clinging to Cyril.

"On the other side of the wall," he answered in the same tone.

"But look here, Miss Leyden," went on Fenwicke's voice, "I don't want you to make any promise, but—if you only do not engage yourself to any other fellow in the meantime."

"Why, of course I shall not," was the somewhat petulant answer. "I have no intention of being engaged to any one. I only want to get home, and to get warm. *Would* you mind taking me back to the others now? I'm sure you can find the way if you try. And I feel certain I am taking cold."

"Good heavens! what a brute I am! Of course we will go back at once. But—you will let me kiss your hand first, won't you? Upon my word, I don't know what you've done to me. Bewitched me, I think. I never thought I could be such a fool about any woman. *May* I?" This very earnestly.

"Yes, you may kiss my hand if you want to, of course. But I'm afraid you will find my glove very wet. This mist is so unpleasant."

There was a short silence, during which Fenwicke presumably took advantage of the permission accorded to him.

Then, after a moment's struggle, Bee laughed—laughed out loud.

"Hush!" whispered Cyril, giving her a little shake. Nevertheless, he was laughing too, though silently.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Fenwicke's voice. "What was that?"

And straightway a scrambling noise preceded the appearance of his indignant face above the top of the wall.

Bee and her companion had subsided on to their log again.

"Oh—er—Fenwicke, is that you?" said Sir Cyril, arranging his eyeglass with an elaborate assumption of surprise. "It's—er—going to be wet, I'm afraid."

"Have you been here long?" inquired Fenwicke, who was looking rather embarrassed.

"No—just this moment arrived," was the prompt and mendacious answer. "We missed our way somehow, and sank down exhausted on this log. You are alone, I suppose?" he added blandly.

"Well—er—no ; Miss Leyden is here," Max answered in a casual kind of way. "We're—er—just arrived too. In fact——" He paused.

Both men looked at each other expressively. Then they both roared.

In the midst of their laughter Miss Leyden climbed over the wall.

"Allow me," said Cyril courteously, rising to accelerate her descent.

"Oh, Sir Cyril, is that you?" she said, smiling sweetly. "And Miss Adeane? I *thought* I heard your voice. Mr. Fenwicke and I are hurrying home. We are so afraid of being lost in the mist."

"Miss Adeane and I were also hurrying home," observed Sir Cyril, stroking his moustache gravely, and gazing straight before him.

"Let us all hurry home together," said Bee demurely.

"Come away, then," acquiesced Miss Leyden, moving nearer to Sir Cyril.

But Fenwicke was not to be shaken off.

"Take my arm, Miss Leyden," he said, half imploringly, half authoritatively.

She hesitated, but observing that Sir Cyril had turned to appropriate Bee, accepted the proffered arm, and disappeared with her cavalier into the mist.

Bee and Cyril walked on for some time in silence, he having returned to the recollection that he was somewhat offended with her, she wondering if their remarks had been as audible to Fenwicke and Miss Leyden as that couple's had been to herself and Cyril.

When they had proceeded some little way Cyril said coldly,

"I wish I understood you, Bee. At one time you give me to understand that—er—there is a possibility of your caring for me, and then you show me plainly that my very touch is repulsive to you."

"Oh, no! I didn't say that, Cyril," was the hasty answer. "I only meant that—that I hated you to kiss me."

"It is the same thing," shortly.

"No, it isn't," in an aggrieved voice, suggestive of possible further tears. "I'm not accustomed to being kissed—by men, I mean."

"Well, no, I should hope not," he answered in an utterly indescribable tone.

"Perhaps—very likely I shall get used to it as time goes on," observed Miss Adeane, looking up at him with troubled grey eyes. "But, in the meantime, I should very much rather you didn't kiss me—at all."

"Pooh! You are talking nonsense," he answered brusquely. "If you don't want to be engaged to me, say so. But I warn you that if we *are* engaged, the probabilities are that I shall kiss you whenever I get a chance. Any fellow would."

"I thought—I thought you would be so different," she faltered. "You always seemed so calm, and sensible, and nice."

"Oh, yes, I daresay," he answered in an exasperated sort of way. "It is usually my fate to be considered beyond the pale of all human passions and emotions. I don't know why, I'm sure."

A pause. Then a small voice said:

"Are you angry, Cyril?"

"Yes, I am angry," he replied tersely enough. "I'm not a saint—nor anything in the least like one."

Then all at once he stopped short in the middle of the dimly-seen pathway, and took her hands somewhat roughly in his.

"Bee—for God's sake don't torture me in this way," he said agitatedly. "Am I to understand that you don't care for me—or that you do? If you do—I am fool enough to promise not to kiss you again until you give me permission to do so. But I tell you—it's awfully hard lines."

His face was pale, and he really looked very handsome, Bee thought, as he stood there in the dim light.

"Very well," she said slowly, "we will be engaged, then. But—we will not think of being married or anything of that kind for years and *years* to come."

Cyril made an impatient movement.

"*Years!*" he remonstrated. "Oh, my dear, be reasonable."

"It is all settled," said Bee cheerfully but inflexibly, "so don't let us talk any more nonsense in the meantime. Listen! there

is Mr. Fenwicke calling to us. Oh, joy! they have found the way out of the wood at last!"

Five minutes later the whole party were obscurely assembled round the waiting carriages.

And—not one of them had found the mythical wishing-well.

CHAPTER XII.

NO ALTERNATIVE!

"To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest.
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we—well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign."

ROBERT BROWNING.

"We know each other's faces; for our hearts—
He knows no more of mine than I of yours;
Nor I of his, my lord, than you of mine."

* * * *

SIR CYRIL insisted on announcing his engagement to Miss Adeane with as little delay as possible. Perhaps he was afraid she would change her mind.

"No, dear," he said with that ineffable calm of manner and speech which always exasperated Bee particularly, "I have given in to you a good deal; but in this matter you must allow me to be the best judge. I do not approve of secret engagements, even for a short time. They give rise to all sorts of misunderstandings, and—er—are a nuisance generally."

It was late in the afternoon of the day following the wishing-well expedition, and by the assistance of their hostess, with whom Sir Cyril was a special favourite, the lovers were alone in a tiny tower-room, dignified by the name of the "boudoir."

"But, Cyril," remonstrated Bee, trifling nervously with the tassel of the window-blind, "we must wait until we have grandfather's consent. You know that."

"Of course. And *après*?" he said quietly.

"Oh, well, after that it will be different."

"Ah! I am glad of that," was the cool answer. "I went up to town early this morning, saw your grandfather, and have succeeded in obtaining his consent to our marriage."

"To our engagement," amended Bee uneasily.

"To our engagement, then—if you like it better," he said impatiently.

"I hardly know," he continued, with a short laugh, "if you will accept an engagement ring from me. I bought one for you to-day. Here it is."

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a small velvet case containing the orthodox "superb half-hoop of diamonds."

Cyril was not at all the kind of fellow to devise touchingly symbolical designs in jewellery for his betrothed. He was not in the least a sentimental young man, and simply bought "the usual thing" in betrothal rings. The diamonds, however, were of considerable size and exquisite brilliancy, and Bee coloured with pleasure as a stray gleam of sunshine flashed into life all their prismatic colours.

"Oh, Cyril, how lovely!" she exclaimed, holding out her hand at once, and without the faintest assumption of coquetry, for him to put it on.

He did so lingeringly; then said in a deliberate sort of way, still holding the slender fingers in his:

"I don't know if I may venture to kiss your hand, my dear Bee, but if so——" He paused, and looked at her unsmilingly.

"Why, yes, of course you may," was the prompt answer.

"Ah, thanks," proceeding at once to do so. "I wasn't sure, you know."

"How absurd you are," was the laughing answer. "Why, ever so many men have kissed my hand."

"Indeed?"—this in a curiously unamiable tone. "In the future—at the risk of being considered exacting—I should prefer its being a peculiar privilege of my own."

"Very well," she answered abstractedly; "I don't mind—not the least little bit."

He looked at her with rather an odd light in his eyes for a moment or two. Then he said:

"Ah!" and stared moodily out of the window.

"I suppose we are really engaged now?" observed Bee presently, regarding her diamonds with loving pride.

"I have an impression that we are," was the somewhat dry answer.

"You are vexed at something, Cyril, are you not?" she said, putting her hand confidingly through his arm.

"Oh, not at all," he replied sarcastically. "I am only wondering if any other lover would submit to the restrictions you impose upon me."

Bee's face grew pink—then rosy.

"You mean, I suppose, that you want to—kiss me?" she said slowly.

He turned and looked down at her, his usually serene blue eyes darkened by an unmistakable frown.

"I do want to kiss you, certainly. What do you think I'm made of?"

"Very well—you may, then," nervously. "Fay says that it is—that it is usual."

Sir Cyril reddened slightly.

"Fay is a most well-informed young woman on all subjects, I have no doubt," he said, with a short laugh.

And then he drew Bee gently within his arm and kissed her. But he did not kiss her lips this time, only brushed her forehead lightly with his moustache, and released her instantly. Nevertheless, she gave a quick sigh of relief as he withdrew his arm again.

"What a cold, cruel little thing you are!" he said somewhat savagely. "And yet—I suppose you know you can do with me just what you like."

She laughed softly.

"Don't look so absurd, Cyril. Tragedy and gloom don't suit you. You are cut out for the correct society young man, and you become a goose when you go in for anything more emotional. Come down and let us have tea. I hate it half cold."

* * * * *

Mrs. Osgood Graves had informed all the company of Sir Cyril's engagement, and when the pair made their tardy appearance in the cosy, firelit inner hall, where afternoon tea was in progress, they were overwhelmed with congratulations.

Bee got through a few blushes very becomingly, and subsided into a chair near Fay, who was looking radiant and almost pretty. Douglas was not visible. Bee felt hurt, somehow, that his congratulations should be the last of all.

Later, when they had all gone to dress save Bee herself, Douglas came in. He looked pale and tired, and came up to the fire—where Bee was standing—without speaking.

"Why, Douglas, I have been wondering where you were," she

said gaily. "There is no one left but me to give you your tea, and I am not at all sure that there is any to give you."

"Thank you, I don't care for any tea," he said quickly.

"Where have you been, you bad boy?" she went on, leaning her pretty head against his arm. "You look quite cold and cross."

"I have been for a walk," he said absently, "and—I suppose I went further than I intended."

"Douglas," she said shyly, after a moment or two, "do you know? Have they told you?"

He did not answer immediately; then he said in a curiously repressed voice:

"Yes—I know. They have—told me."

"And," reproachfully, "are you not going to wish me happiness?"

He stood quite still for a minute, his face stony and expressionless.

You see, in real life, men—men who are worthy the name, that is to say—take their hardest blows for the most part in silence, and without any of those dramatic gestures and fine speeches which certain playwrights and novelists have accustomed us to. It is exciting and romantic, to be sure, to see the despairing lover rant and rave, and tear his hair, and beat his breast as though it were a tambourine; but, alas! it is not *real*. And as I am simply relating an ordinary every-day story, I am obliged to keep to facts, and confess that, though Douglas was to-night suffering the bitterest pain he had ever known, he made no sign, and only said, after a short pause:

"Do you need to ask that?" Then he added with infinite tenderness, "My little Bee, I pray God you may be very, very happy. I have known for a long time that Northburgh—cared for you; and I have more than suspected that you—cared for him."

"Well, you knew more than I did, then," she murmured, rubbing her head up and down his coat sleeve. Then, after a minute, she said, looking up at him with adorable, innocent eyes, "And are you not going to kiss your little sister, then, on such an auspicious occasion? Are you going to let the new ties entirely supersede the old ones? Kiss me directly, you hard-hearted old thing."

His face grew white;] his hands opened and shut in a kind of

dumb agony. He knew well enough it was no brother's kiss he could give her then ; and he would have died rather than have disturbed her innocently loving idea of him. With a mighty effort he controlled himself, and said quietly :

"No, dear, I will not kiss you. Your—your lover would not like it ; and—I can understand that he would not. Nevertheless, no one in the world desires your happiness more earnestly, more passionately, than I."

"Ah, Douglas !" she said, smiling roguishly, "how loyal you are, you dear old fellow ! And, do you know, I think I like you the better for it."

He looked down at her and smiled—a smile that would have broken her heart if she had known all the misery it held at bay.

"And are you very happy, my dear ?" he said, in a low voice.

She did not answer, but his jealous eyes noted the swift colour that mounted to her fair face.

"That is well, child," he went on, laying his hand on her tawny hair. "It makes me—very happy—to think—to know that the future of my little girl is so bright, and so likely to be free from care."

"Dear old Douglas !" she made answer caressingly. "I know that no one wishes me happiness more sincerely than you do. But when am I to congratulate you, my dear ? I quite long to welcome Fay as a sister."

He looked at her for a moment half incredulously.

"Fay !" he said, in a strange hoarse voice. "What have I to do with Fay, or she with me ? You must be mad, Bee, to talk of such things—now !"

"My poor Douglas, you are tormenting yourself unnecessarily," went on the sweet childish voice. "Don't you *know* how the poor darling loves you ? When I told her last night how miserable you were, and how you did not dare to tell her of your love, she—oh, my dear, I hardly like to tell you—but she cried for joy."

Douglas did not speak. He was leaning against the mantel-shelf, his eyes hidden by his hand.

How loud the measured beats of the great clock on the staircase ! How the wind swept and swirled round the high, old-fashioned windows !

Presently Douglas altered his position slightly, and said in a voice Bee had never heard before :

"You—told her—of my—love for her?"

"Yes, dear. I could not bear to see you both so unhappy, and to know that a word would put everything right."

Another silence.

Far up the staircase sounded the tap, tap of a woman's footsteps.

Douglas felt Bee's soft lips upon the hand that hung nervelessly by his side ; then she flitted noiselessly away.

For a moment or two he stood quite still where she had left him, then sank into a chair, pressing his hands to his forehead, as if in actual physical pain.

The fire had died down to a dull red ; a pale wintry moon stole in, her light lying in bars of faint silver across the dark oak floor.

The footsteps had halted for a brief space ; then they came nearer—nearer—close to him—and stopped.

He did not stir.

"Douglas!" said a sweet tremulous voice. "Douglas!"

He raised his head then, and looked at her, as one in a dream. She was kneeling beside him ; her hand was on his arm ; her face, wet with tears, was very close to his..

Heavy clouds had drifted across the moon ; the silent hall was in darkness.

Even in his own misery a curious pity for the trembling young creature at his side took possession of him. She loved him, poor child. She believed that he loved her. Could he condemn her to suffer as he was suffering?—nay, more—to the humiliating knowledge of having betrayed her love, unasked, to a man who would have none of it? What could he do? What ought he to have done? I cannot tell you. What he did do was to put his arm round her and draw her to him, with much the same impulse with which he would have comforted a grieving child.

She hid her face on his arm in a passion of tears.

"Oh, Douglas—I am so happy!" she sobbed breathlessly.

Ah! it was well for her, if not for him, that she did not see his face just then. Surely the look in his eyes would have enlightened her.

They remained thus for some time—silently ; for he could not trust himself to speech, and her joy held her dumb.

"What does it matter? What can it matter?" his sore heart echoed drearily. "If I can brighten her life, why not? My own life is over—so far as love is concerned."

And so he sealed his fate.

Presently Fay started to her feet, and moved away from him.

"I—I thought I heard some one coming," she said nervously.

Just then the dressing-gong sounded from the outer hall.

Douglas rose, and took the girl's cold little hands in his.

"Fay—I am a comparatively poor man," he said in a strange, almost hard voice. "Are you willing to face the world with me?"

"Oh, yes, I am willing!" came her tremulous answer through the semi-darkness.

Poor child! She did not notice his shortcomings as a lover. To face the world with him! What would she not have faced with him?

He bent his head and kissed her forehead. His lips were cold, and he uttered no murmured love-words. But Fay was happy—unutterably happy. For one brief second her head rested on his heart. How strongly and swiftly it beat!

Then she fled quickly up the broad oak staircase, and he was once more alone. He felt old, and tired, and desperately heart-sick.

* * * *

Some hours later, when dinner was a thing of the past, a slim fur-robed figure stepped out upon the terrace in the chilly moonlight, and went noiselessly to Douglas Conrath's side as he leaned moodily over the heavy stone coping which overlooked the desolate winter-bound rose garden.

The figure, which belonged to Bee Adeane, slipped its little hand under his arm, and glanced up affectionately into his face, which surely looked strangely white and haggard under the searching moonbeams.

"It is my turn now to congratulate you, Douglas," said the new-comer softly. "Fay has told me how happy she is; and I know how happy you must be. And now I see you are looking anxious and worried, because you are thinking, not so much of Fay herself, as of—Fay's mother. Is it not so?"

Now, as a matter of fact, Douglas had been wondering somewhat wearily and sardonically how Lady Dinwoodie would take his proposal for her daughter. He had not much to offer, certainly, and even if she gave her consent to an engagement, she would probably utterly scout the idea of a speedy marriage—for which latter possibility happy Miss Dinwoodie's *fiancé* was almost passionately thankful.

In answer to Bee's sympathetic words he answered quietly, "Yes, I was thinking of Lady Dinwoodie."

"I'm afraid, you know," went on Bee—"don't be angry, dear—but I'm *afraid* she may be just a little—*difficile*."

"I think it is more than probable," Douglas answered, with a short laugh, which was certainly not a merry one.

"But I am sure," added his companion earnestly, "when she knows how much you love each other, and when you explain to her—as of course you will do—how certain you are to be both rich and famous very, *very* soon—that she will give her consent."

He did not answer. He was looking steadily away from her, his gaze resting mechanically upon the silvered branches of the evergreens in the shrubbery.

For a few moments Bee was silent too. Then she said in a dreamy voice:

"It is a strange coincidence, is it not, my dear, that you and I should both be engaged to be married on the same day? Is it a happy omen, I wonder? Does it mean that——"

"Bee!—for God's sake, don't speak to me any more!" he interrupted her hoarsely. "Not to-night. I—I can't bear it!"

The words held a kind of heart-broken impotent cry, and Bee was both startled and alarmed.

"Douglas," she whispered agitatedly, "what is it? What have I said?"

He was leaning his elbows on the edge of the balcony, and as she spoke he hid his face in his hands with a suppressed groan.

Just then, by one of those malicious chances with which Fate loves so dearly to confront us, Cyril Northburgh came out upon the terrace.

Now, if you have reason to imagine that your betrothed cares for you just about one half as much as you care for her; and if you have been chafingly wondering at her non-appearance for the best part of half an hour; and if at the end of that time you

find her on a moonlit terrace with a fellow for whom you entertain rather a dislike than otherwise, all alone by themselves, you will be hardly human if you don't feel out of temper.

Conrath's dejected attitude, Bee's anxious startled face—all seemed to indicate to the new-comer some kind of "scene" which his advent had interrupted.

"Had you not better come indoors, Bee?" he said in a tone of icy displeasure. "Are you not afraid of taking cold?"

At the sound of his voice Douglas started and raised his head; then, without speaking, he passed into the house, leaving the lovers alone.

"Your friend seems rather knocked out of time," observed Cyril disagreeably. "What's the matter with him?"

Bee resented his lordly tone, and made answer, with an indignant flash in her grey eyes:

"I think you are exceedingly rude, Cyril, and I may tell you at once that if you are going to get into one of your absurd tantrums about nothing at all, I shall just break off our engagement—or whatever you call it—at once, and that will be the end."

This threat secretly dismayed her lover, for he knew she was more than capable of carrying it out. Besides, her words cut him to the quick.

"Our 'engagement, or whatever you call it,'" he repeated in a deeply hurt voice, "is not so easily broken. Surely, Bee, there is no one to whom you are so cruel as you are to me."

"Oh, I am not cruel," she answered petulantly. "But I am so worried and unhappy about my darling Douglas."

"Bee! Upon my word!" remonstrated Sir Cyril hotly.

"Of course you are quite happy, and so you don't care," went on Bee, unheeding. "It is nothing to you that poor Douglas is so miserable. But Cyril"—with a sudden happy thought—"you will do what you can for him, won't you?"

Her companion turned somewhat pale.

"I don't understand you," he answered sternly. "What do you mean?"

Bee twined her little hands about his arm, and said very earnestly:

"You will listen to me, will you not?"

"I am listening," he replied in an icy tone.

"And—you will not be angry?"

"I cannot tell you"—more icily still. Then, glancing at his watch, he added, "But as it is rather late, may I ask you to say what you have to say as quickly as possible?"

There was a moment's pause; then Bee said, with a half-sob in her voice:

"Shall you be as cross to me when—when I am your wife, Cyril?"

He turned and took her almost fiercely in his arms.

"Bee"—he said inarticulately, "do you know that you are *tor-turing* me? Tell me, for pity's sake, what you mean. Is it—is it that you have repented of your—your promise of yesterday?"

He looked so white and agitated, so unlike himself, that tender-hearted Bee was full of concern.

"Cyril, how dreadful—how *ill* you look," she said hastily. "Most certainly I don't want to break my promise to you. What I have to ask you has nothing to do with myself—nothing at all. You cannot have understood me. It is about Douglas—Douglas and Fay."

"About Douglas and Fay," he repeated mechanically, while a keen shiver of relief ran through him. "Douglas and Fay. What about them?"

"I will tell you directly. But first take away your arms. Fancy if any one were to come out."

"Wait a moment," he said unsteadily. "Oh Bee, my dearest—do you know how horribly you frightened me? My love, my darling, forgive me that I doubted you." His eyes held an unwonted look of passion; he was breathing somewhat quickly. "My own little sweetheart!" he murmured passionately. And with the words he bent his head and kissed her lips.

She did not resist his caress this time—and indeed it was a very gentle one—but blushed rosily, and extricated herself from his arms.

"Now, listen to me," she said hurriedly. "Douglas wants to marry Fay, and Fay wants to marry him. And we are quite sure Lady Dinwoodie will not approve of it. So of course Douglas is very unhappy. Now, if you will speak to your aunt—you know she always takes your advice—then it will be all right."

"But, my dear child," answered Cyril, when he could get a word in, "I'm—er—I'm not at all sure that—er—that a marriage of that kind would be for my cousin's happiness."

He was secretly, however, both surprised and relieved, having been hitherto under the impression that Douglas's affections lay in the same direction as his own.

"A marriage of what kind?" repeated Bee indignantly. "Why, any girl might be proud to marry Douglas!"

Cyril shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"I am not detracting in any way from Mr. Conrath's merits," he said quietly. "The question is—can he afford to marry? That is to say, if he marries, can he afford to live in the way in which Fay has been accustomed to live? She is fond of pretty things and luxuries, you know; and literature is rather a precarious calling."

"But they wouldn't want to be married just yet," was the eager answer. "Nobody wants to be married just directly they are engaged."

"That is your opinion, doubtless," observed her *fiancé* drily. "But I doubt if your friend Douglas will agree with you."

"And besides," went on Bee, with growing earnestness, "no one can doubt that Douglas will be a rich man one day. With such genius as his, fortune *must* come."

"I am sorry to damp your enthusiasm, my dear child; but I can assure you that in the race for wealth geniuses are simply nowhere. If one intends being born a genius, it is well to ensure oneself being born a millionaire as well."

"But, Cyril, Douglas told me himself that he makes £500 a year out of short stories and sketches alone; and, besides that, he is writing another book, and he will certainly get not less than £1,000 for that. So there is £1,500 at once. Why, even your income can't be much more than that."

"Can't it?" he said, raising his eyebrows.

"Have you more than that, Cyril? How much have you—a year, I mean? Do tell me," she asked curiously.

"Just about as many thousands as the hundreds you have been talking of," he said, laughing. "And I don't find it at all too much, I can tell you."

Bee looked almost distressed.

"Oh, Cyril," she said, "I had no idea you were so—so well off."

"Haden't you?" he answered tenderly. "Well, you are a dear little unworldly darling; and I have no doubt that you are the only woman of my acquaintance who didn't know. Now we

must go in. It is getting chilly. As for Conrath, let him manage his love affairs for himself. You have enough to do with your own. No, Bee, I shall not interfere—so all your blandishments are in vain."

And with a caressing laugh he stooped and kissed her again. Then drawing her hand through his arm, he led her into the house.

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It was the forenoon of the next day; and the Fates had prepared a bad little quarter of an hour for Douglas.

He had just come round from the stables with Max Fenwicke, when in crossing the outer hall he met Lady Dinwoodie. She stopped, and said in a rather imperious tone:

"I shall be glad of a little conversation with you, Mr. Conrath, if you are quite at liberty."

Douglas bowed silently, and followed her into the morning-room, which chanced to be empty. A feeling of resentment took possession of him. He had intended to seek this interview to-day, of course; but, naturally, he did not like it to be forced upon him, and I am afraid his bearing showed as much. He stood very tall and straight upon the hearthrug, his eyes bent upon his companion with "an air of dignity quite beyond his income," as that lady unconsciously quoted to herself.

"I also wished to have a short conversation with you, Lady Dinwoodie," he said quietly. "In a word, I would ask your permission to become engaged to your daughter."

"Oh, of course I know that. Fay has told me all about it," was the impatient answer. "That is what I want to speak to you about. I have dreaded it for some time; and if I had known you were to be here I should certainly have kept her away. You must see, Mr. Conrath, what a very foolish marriage it would be. Of course your career may be a brilliantly successful one; but then it may be quite the reverse. Fay is not the girl to be happy without—er—a great many things that she would not have as your wife. Pardon me if I speak plainly, but you must remember that my child's happiness is of the last importance to me. I do not think you ought to have spoken to her, Mr. Conrath. I do not indeed."

"I am aware," Douglas answered, in a low tired voice, very unlike that of an anxious lover, "that in many ways I am not what would be called 'a good match' for your daughter. If

I did not believe that her—her marriage with me would be for her happiness, I should not presume to ask for your consent. I cannot, perhaps, offer her quite such a luxurious home as she has been accustomed to ; but I hope to improve my position, and she should, at least, have all the care and——” Here he hesitated and coloured deeply, then went on, in a somewhat hurried tone, “And I should do all in my power to make her happy.”

“Oh, of course, of course,” fretfully. “You all say the same. And I suppose Fay will give me no peace until I consent. It really is too provoking. I had such different views for her.”

Douglas was silent. His marked air of depression and his excessive pallor were, of course, taken by Lady Dinwoodie as evidences of his consuming love for her daughter. She felt sorry for him ; indeed, his gentle courteous manners, and perhaps his handsome eyes, caused him to win his way to the hearts of most women. But she knew it was necessary to harden her heart, and did so.

“I suppose you are aware that my daughter has no money, Mr. Conrath,” she said, looking at him searchingly—“nor any prospect of any.” The next moment she felt rather ashamed of this little speech.

Douglas drew himself up haughtily.

“I never thought of the matter,” he said, with a sudden flash in his eyes. “Her having money or not is a matter of the utmost indifference to me.”

Lady Dinwoodie coughed gently.

“Suppose we leave the matter in the meantime, Mr. Conrath ?” she said, leaning forward with an engaging smile.

Just then the door opened, and Fay herself came in. She was looking pale and tired. Douglas thought he had never seen her look plainer and less attractive.

“Now, mother, I have caught you,” she said gaily as she entered. “I suppose you are trying to persuade Douglas to give me up. But it is not one bit of use. Is it, Douglas ?” And as she spoke she came up to him, and put her hand, with happy confidence, through his arm.

He smiled faintly.

“Your mother has persuaded me that I am the most selfish of men,” he said, without, however, glancing at the flushed adoring face which just reached his shoulder.

"Ah, mother, it is too bad of you!" exclaimed Fay passionately. "How can you love me, as you say you do, if you are so cruel to me? If I do not marry Douglas I shall marry no one—*no* one, I tell you!" And the spoiled self-willed girl broke into a perfect storm of sobs.

Her mother looked helpless and worried.

And Douglas? What could he do but comfort her—this headstrong girl, who had so fearlessly avowed her love for him, and evidently trusted so implicitly in his love for her?

"Hush, hush, my dear," he said nervously, stroking the bowed flaxen head, and looking as happy and comfortable as most Englishmen do when they are partakers of a sentimental scene. "Fay, calm yourself. Do—there's a good girl."

His tone was not in the least lover-like. Indeed, to a keen ear it held a suppressed irritation; and a faint but unmistakable frown drew down his dark eyebrows.

"Fay—really, I am astonished at you!" exclaimed her mother. "Mr. Conrath—I—really——" And with a despairing gesture that spoke volumes, she, too, wept—for pure vexation.

It was at this inauspicious moment that the door opened to admit Max Fenwicke and Miss Leyden, followed almost immediately by Sir Cyril Northburgh and Bee.

Douglas smothered a very objectionable word between his teeth, and regarded the intruders with a haughty stare. At the same time Fay, to his infinite relief, raised herself from his arms and stopped crying.

There was a minute's dead silence, during which Fenwicke and Miss Leyden judiciously withdrew. As the door closed behind them Fay went quickly up to her cousin, and said in a faint, imploring voice:

"Cyril, you have always been good to me. Speak to mother, and tell her how unkind she is."

Sir Cyril was looking annoyed and perplexed, for Bee's little fingers were surreptitiously pinching his arm at quick intervals. He knew she expected him to take the part of the lovers; and he knew that in doing so he would be acting in direct opposition to his judgment.

Douglas was standing upright and rigid, his lips compressed, his eyes—with an utterly untranslatable expression in their dark depths—looking straight before him.

Presently Cyril spoke.

"Suppose you and I talk this over, aunt?" he said, addressing Lady Dinwoodie in his most expressionless manner. "You can see Mr. Conrath again later."

Bee silently drew Fay out of the room, and Douglas turned to Lady Dinwoodie, who was still lying back in her chair, her handkerchief pressed to her eyes. Taking her hand in his, he said, in a low voice:

"I do not wish you to make any decision but what you think will be for your daughter's happiness. Put me out of the question altogether."

A speech at which Sir Cyril marvelled.

"By Jove!" he mused as Douglas left the room, "the fellow must either be devilishly fond of her, or else he doesn't care a rap for her." But, of course, he dismissed the latter contingency as absurd.

As for Douglas, he flung himself out of doors, in a mood impossible to be described. He tramped down the avenue, and thence out on to the muddy road, his hands plunged fiercely into his pockets, and an unlighted cigar held firmly between his teeth, hardly knowing whether he felt more wretched or more furious.

When he returned some hours later, Sir Cyril met him.

"I think I've made it all right for you, Conrath," he said, more cordially than usual—for the other's white haggard face touched him somehow. "You'll find my aunt about somewhere. Accept my congratulations. I feel sure you'll do your best to make Fay happy, and—er—all that sort of thing, you know," he concluded in the graceful and lucid phraseology of the modern Englishman.

"Thank you," returned Douglas, somewhat stiffly, as he took the hand the other held out to him.

For the life of him he could not bring himself to say anything further, and after a moment's awkward silence the two men parted and went their several ways—Cyril in search of Bee, and Douglas in search of his future mother-in-law.

(To be continued.)

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